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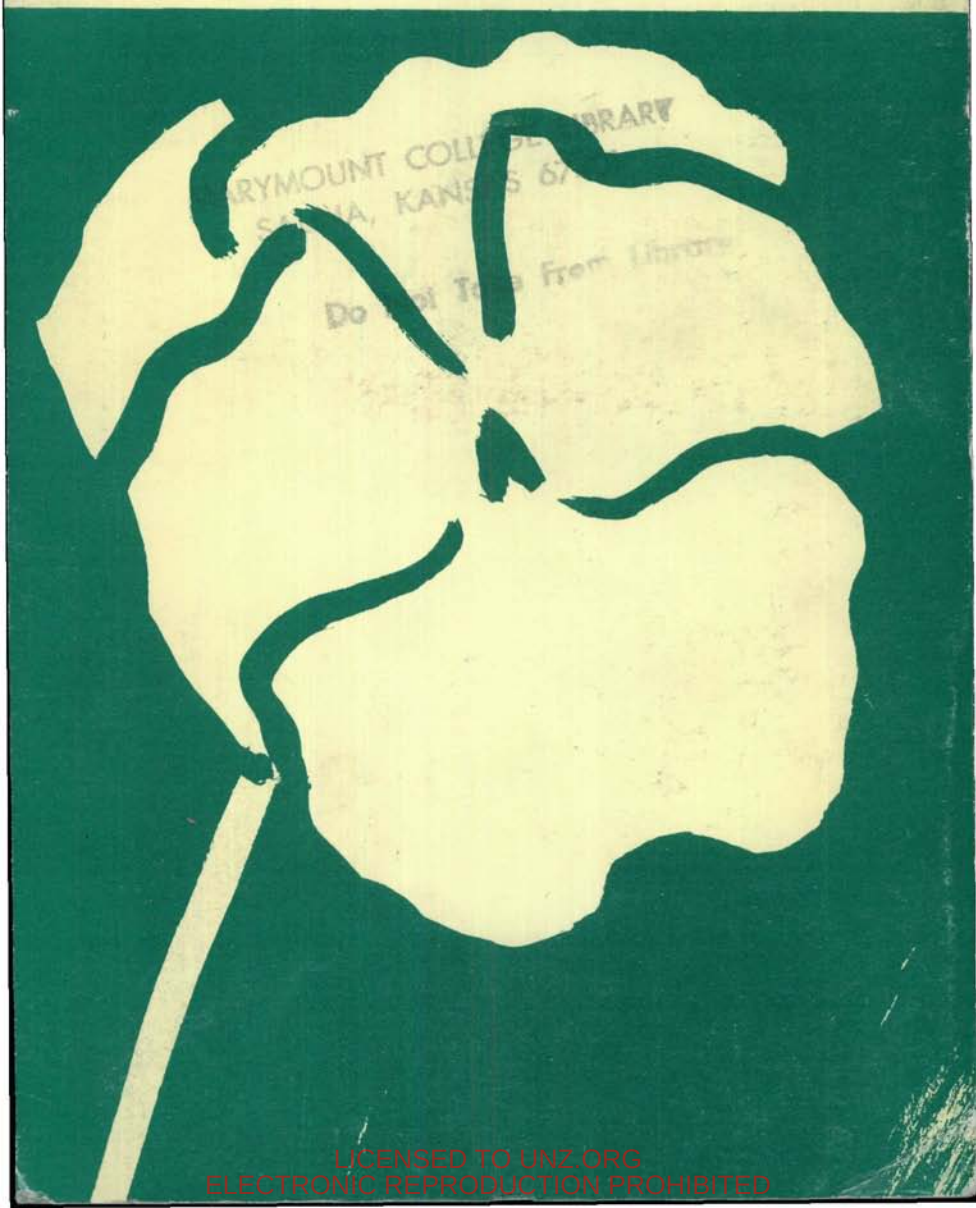

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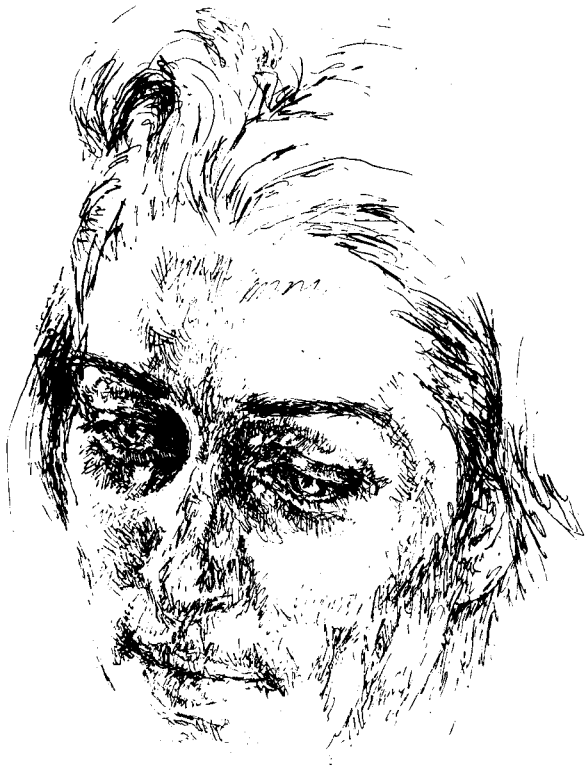

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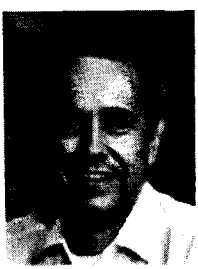

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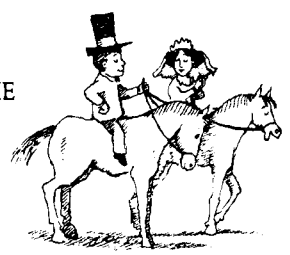

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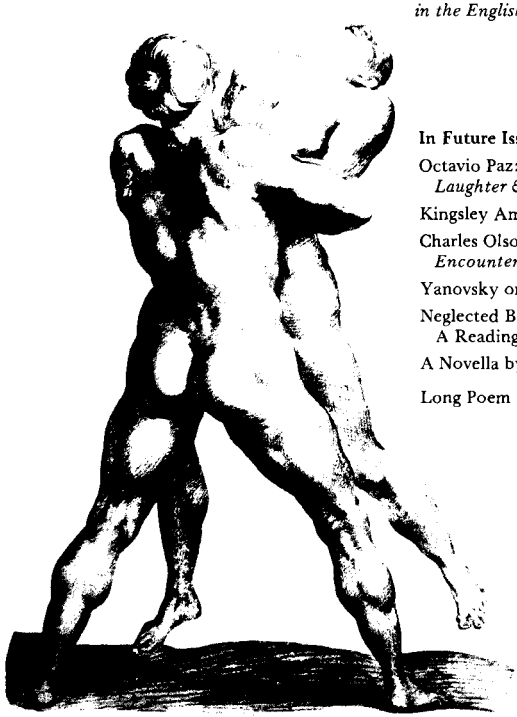

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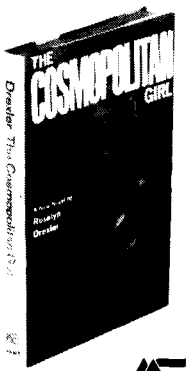

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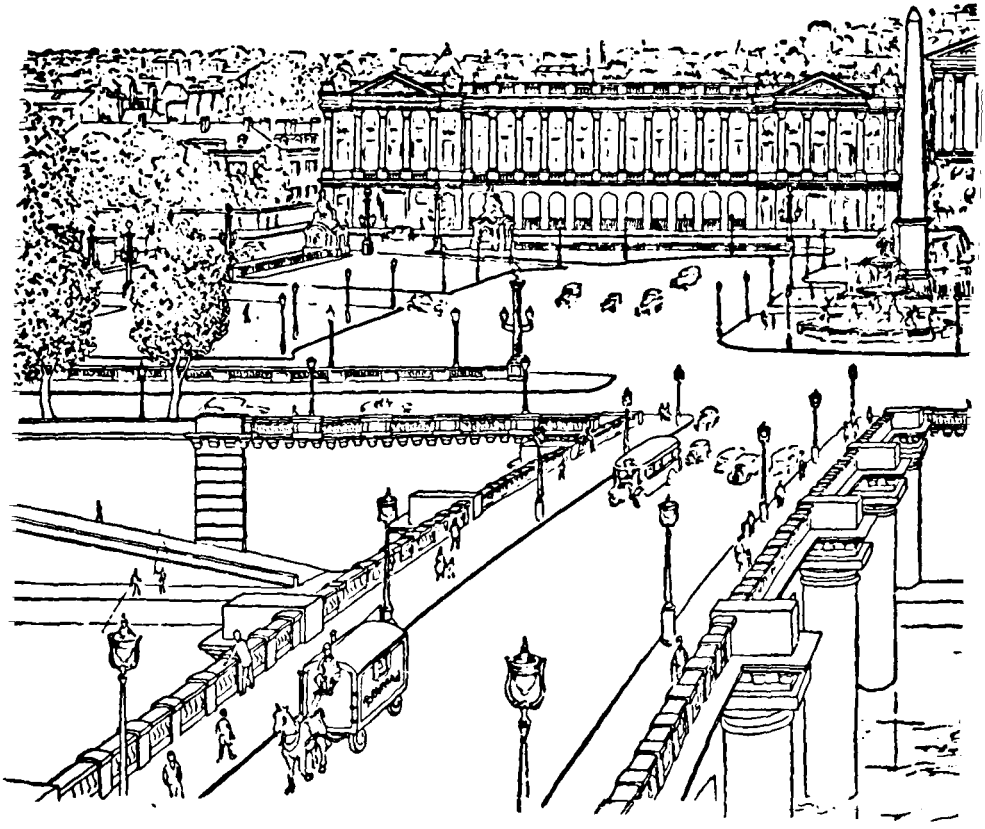

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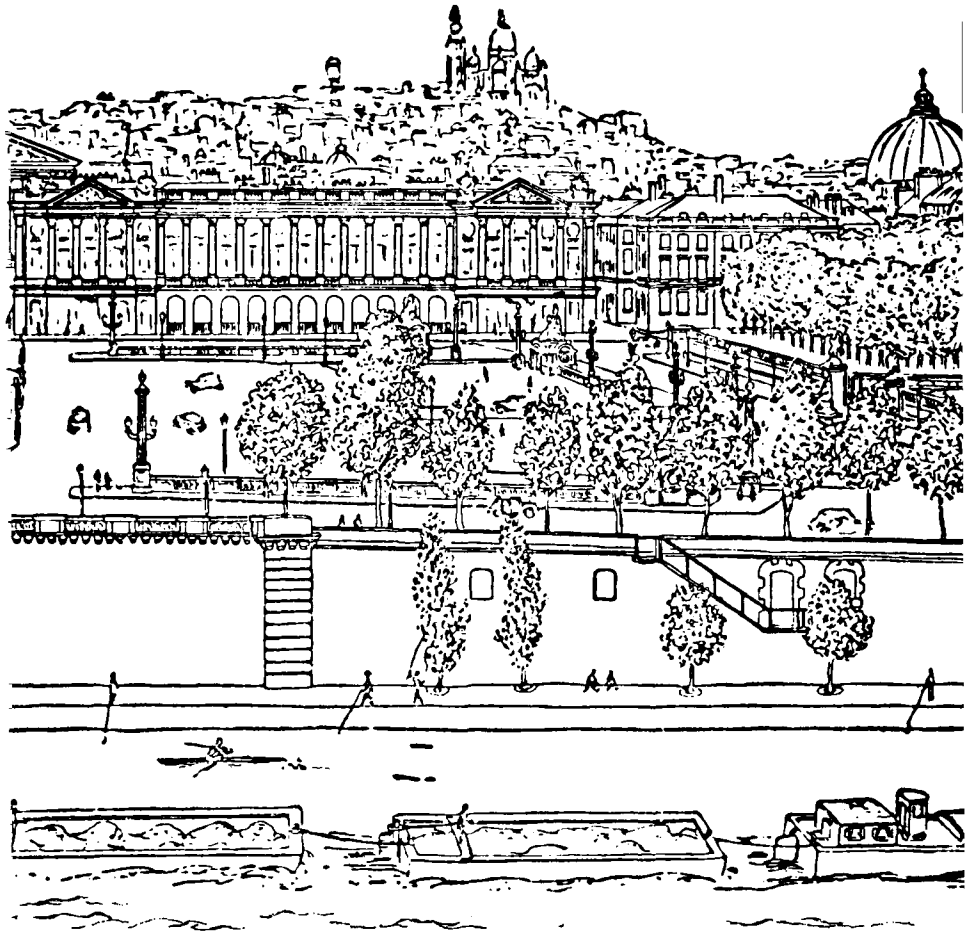

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Space Time

M.F. Beal

Mr. Russell, the not-old man who was old, arrived at arbitrary intervals in the mornings, fragmenting her energies as a stubborn thumb crushes a walnut. His cheeks were packed with silver bristles bulging like the sides of a fish. He tongued a cigar. She offered coffee and he took it, then watched her sit in his mother's rocker. After certain words, spoken out of habit it seemed, he mounted his pickup and turned to return.

The barn on the hill; the tiny trailer by the spring where the old woman had died; the burnt-out foundations of the great house breathing quietly among the gaudy flesh of poppies and nasturtiums, thyme and mint, peonies and lilacs. She turned from painting horses and tried to capture what she saw around her, setting images on spongy paper, carrying her pictures in her head as she bent to laundry and dishes or bathed her body which held ripening seed packed hard and tight as a pear at her pubis. From tubes of raw color she abstracted petals, shreds of weed and wood, her hands moving automatically, her mind empty and clean as the cry of an animal. In the evenings her

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husband came home from loading boxcars at the mill tired and dirty and watched her sit in the rocker. She told him Mr. Russell had been there. They talked over what they knew of the place.

"They came out here from Elgin, Illinois, in '27, and built a lean-to and this big barn the first summer and fall. There were Indians down by the river, then; one who is his blood brother if still alive, because they were both boys together playing in the shallows. There are Indian graves in the corner of the pasture by the pinoaks. Then spring, summer and fall of 1928, built the house: eleven big rooms, two verandahs, the back porch and pantry. Two floors, a glassed-in room in the attic where Mrs. Russell did her sewing. Then in '45, the house burned: they moved into part of the barn. In '49 old Mr. Russell retired. In '50 he died. But his wife hung on, twenty years a widow before she gave up and died. And in that sometime, her son put her in the trailer by the spring." "Then when she was buried he sold to us." "There was nothing disturbed in the barn; still all the old tools, her furniture; he never tried to take them before we bought." "He must have hated them badly."

"I won't speak ill of the dead," Mr. Russell said watching her in his mother's rocker in the mornings. Then lapsed quiet.

She found in the rafters a metal box, black, the size of a tool-chest, filled with papers. In a small notebook among the letters and forms she read:

> March 20 1933
>
> Sat night at about 11:25 p.m. my attention was called to the porch and there I seen Ellis and Jared squared off and I went between them. Jared seemed to be the worst so I shook him up until he would talk to me, and told him and showed him who I was and told him to quiet down. He said he would. He started back in the hall, I was going to talk to Ellis and I heard a commotion inside the door. Jared was into another mix, with a light haired man that I did not know—I went in between them and took the light haired guy outside, Jared got sassy and abusive to me and Spydel who was helping me. then was when I punched him.

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> There was a lot that happened that I cannot describe in writing but still I seen it like one sight—saw him run on to me and I told him to get back. he payed no atention so I caught him by the arm, he struck at me, I caught his lick and jumped back as his right hand went tord his side. I took the play from him, then surched him for a gun, but he had none, so I told him to get out of the mix-up and stay out. He did.
> I sighted Ellis and Jared to citizen's arrest to appear in cort the following Monday and they changed it to Wensday and both payed a fine of $15, three days wages.

His cheeks were flecked with light like a rock crowded with crystals when he stood at the barn's door asking admission. Mornings he came, and she wondered whether to tell him about his father, the black box, or whether it would give him pain, the way pain showed in his eyes when he said "I will not speak ill of the dead." So she said nothing.

Her husband stapled insulation to the long high center part of the barn, the part that had never been finished, and she took layer on layer of carpet, the stains on the backs showing dark red like dried blood from the dye, and dragged them to air on the fence. Beneath, linoleum patterned to look like wood, worn at the sink, the places where chairs had been. She made pancakes by breaking an egg into a hollowed-out place in the flour barrel, letting the flour form the container as well as the contents, letting the egg take up into itself as much as it needed of binder. Then she lifted the mass to a mixing bowl and returned to catch away clots of moist flour to add to her bowl; finally she poured milk over the egg-moist flour and beat a moment while the griddle popped.

There were so many of the old woman's collections, so many saved, watched, tidied, hoarded, dusted magazines jars boxes rags basins calendars thermometers mirrors clothesradiosfryingpanstoolsflowerpotschairs that she knew the old woman had not *wanted* to move to the tiny trailer but had been forced to: by her son? by age? by the cold un-insulated center room of the barn communicating its chill to the two rooms at the side

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which had been finished, floored, painted, heated? She sat in the old women's rocker with the odor of nasturtiums thick in her nostrils and stared out over the burnt hole where the great house had been, and beyond to the tiny trailer, then further to the road where he, the dead woman's son, came driving mornings, and she wondered where the old woman's body was laid to rest.

She and her husband heard a hard thump against the barn siding and went into the thin sharp air of dusk to find dry feathers scattered like leaves around the body of a grouse, its eye already frosted with dust, claws folded, neck loose, beak open, tiny purple tongue slack as a bubble in oil. Her husband remembered: in fall, at dusk, the young grouse left flying blindly away from the place of their birth, from the scents and sounds of their parent's turf. But she thought of it as trying to penetrate the barn, understand what was within, as she tried to penetrate the secrets of the place by battering her head with clues.

Looking across the pasture to the abandoned trailer one morning just after her husband left for work she saw the old woman who was dead standing in its door. As mist curls from a creekbottom with early sun the short white-haired figure bodied out of the corroded aluminum sides of the metal house and stood, watching her, she realized, as her son watched. At this distance the eyes would not be expected to burn the air, but they did, bright and thoughtful. She was tempted to fear the vision, but it was too dry and painless a moment for that; so she looked, and considered, placing movement and light patterns the cattle made in the awakening day against the dim presence of the old woman, until slowly she faded as does a sound among general commotions.

On the shelf in a canning cupboard still stocked with pickles, tomatoes, applesauce and pitted cherries was a booklet:

> Dearly Beloved Friends in the Lord:
> The study of the prophetic Scriptures comforts and

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> strengthens the child of God. When one faces apparent disaster the fact that God is still in control of the nations generates faith. It is encouraging to know that Ezekial has prophesied the final defeat of Russia. This prophesy is yet to be fulfilled. Again we are strengthened and comforted as we study the prophetic Scriptures. We know now Russia has been drawn into the Mediterranean area since 1955 lured by her desire to control the Suez Canal. We believe that this may set the stage for Armageddon. . . .

. . . from the rafters above as he set insulation her husband plucked whiskey bottles, splits of brown beerglass, wine jugs, a vanilla bottle (label pat. 1923, alcohol 50%) and they laughed about old Graham Russell, the drythroated farmer, perched in the rafters musing on his wife reading religious tracts; that would have been before the house burned, before she came to live in his place, his barn.

"I won't speak ill of the dead," their son told her, smiling, running a slow tongue over the cigar, lugubriously thoughtful, tantalizing. "Dad worked as a young man for the railroad. Twenty-five years, same as me, only I quit after twenty-two when I found out how they stole off our pension funds. By then he had the place bought, once with his money, another time with our sweat, third around with a little blood." He was the quietest man in talk she had ever seen. He sat like a stone speaking, and his words came off him slow as a rock's breath. In the black box, last mortal remains of the man Graham Russell, she found a letter:

> Fremont D. Schmieder
> Post Office Box 999
> Eugene, Oregon
>
> MR. GRAHAM S. RUSSELL February 28, 1949
> Star Route #1
> Oakridge, Oregon
>
> Dear Russell:
>
> Today marks another milestone in your life. Your remarkable record with us shows that you have com-

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pleted over 25 years of continuous service. It should give you a great deal of satisfaction looking back upon the many experiences that you have encountered during your service with Georgia-Pacific. Now that you are going to retire from our services, I want to commend you on your long and faithful service and to express the thought that we all have—that in your days to come you will enjoy good health and happiness and will have a satisfying recollection of a job well done.

With kindest personal regards to you and your wife, and with every good wish for a successful realization of all your future plans, I remain,

Sincerely Yours,

(sig.) F.D. Schmieder

A mimeographed notice clipped to the letter said:

Mr. Graham S. Russell

It has been agreed that the inscription placed on Service Award watches should include the date of the employees 25th year anniversary.

If you desire to have this information engraved on the back of your watch, please bring it to the pay window and we will have the inscription made for you by a local engraver.

The son, the man in his early fifties who was old of all his past and present, his parents' lives and his own, chewed and tongued his cigar like a baby at the nipple, speaking in measured fairness of his parents and the railroad, and especially (more heatedly) of the railroad pension fund he would not be able to collect on until—it fell apart in her head as she thought instead of his father, of her own child within, growing, thrusting itself against the skin of her belly and the stuff of her apron in its own intense rhythms. . .

In a cookbook left by the old woman she discovered an envelope, addressed, stamped, never mailed. The seal on its flap was buckled and brown from age, the date on the pages inside: Aug. 6, 1945

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My Dearest One:

It is 10:40 Sunday morning. You, no doubt, received my short note yesterday. Graham and the boys come back late last night and we have had a long hard talk and it was on my lips to tell him about you and I.

The fire did clean us out. Burned about 2 acres of feed back of the place and of course too trees around the house—the three larger oak trees that were in back of the house are dead, but some of the other have new leaves. Mother did save a few things, her purse and the box with the bonds and etc., the baby's buggy. The milk bucket happened to be outside on a post so that was retrieved. Everything else was burned—Graham said, that it wasn't more than *40* minutes (from the time they discovered it) until the house was just ashes. Burned pieces of the house was found as far up as Big Creek. There wasn't a piece of charred wood left—nothing but ashes and the skeletons of the stoves, springs, pans and etc.

So what Graham talked about was that we would build a lean-to-room into the west side of the haybarn and line the inside with beaverboard or plaster board (which he is getting today) We will be quite comfortable for the winter from all appearances. I have more sheets, pillows, blankets, towels and etc. then I ever did have before. We have a two burner gasoline stove, a three burner coal oil stove and a nice size wood stove. Walt Jensen gave us enough electric wiring (and some fixtures) to reach from the old hook up to the barn, so we will have light in both rooms. Fortunately I had my sewing machine (not electric) out to repair, and some things here at my sisters.

The house was the only building burned.

Well, my dear, how goes things down there. I know you miss me as much as I do you. I guess you will read between the lines of this letter to find out how I feel about us. With Graham on this new run there's not much to do. I can read, but then my head aches: so I don't. "By night on my bed I seek you whom my soul loveth: I seek you but I find you not."

The weather is warm up here, but not as hot as it is at home. Sis has a pet hen, Betsy. At present she is in the kitchen here standing by my chair. Does a lot of talking

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like Susie, but Betsy is black with mottled brown neck. Really quite a gal.

Well, my darling, no more to write about at present so will close for this time. Will write more in a day or two.

A load of love to you
Allways Yours

Dorris

"I won't speak ill of the dead."

In the seventh month of her pregnancy she found a deep path of laziness at her bones that ran heavy as a river through her and sent her in nightclothes through noontime rooms. She never wondered when she heard his pickup later now, more toward early afternoon. He brought walnuts from a tree in his yard in town, and a baby blanket he and his wife had purchased for the infant which was swelling her cumbersome and slow. He watched her move around the barn getting him a cup of coffee, his eyes thoughtful, his mouth full of unsaid words. He said his son had sent a letter, his son was a dentist, and fixed the teeth of soldiers. His son remarked that a lot of soldiers, especially country boys, had rotten teeth, and that he was getting a lot of practice making dentures. At least they would be able to bite meat when they got out. He watched her with sturdy intensity as he spoke, and the sound of his thumb crushing walnut hulls punctuated his words forlornly. She realized he loved her.

The baby moved almost constantly and kept her from sleeping deeply at night. She considered telling her husband about Mr. Russell. She was embarrassed to be loved by him, and yet she understood in a way beyond words why he came. She did not love him and yet she could not hurt him. She looked out the window at the empty trailer and the old woman's shape wisped and quavered in the early evening light. Suddenly she saw how the old woman had been fitted for death: First the large house of eleven rooms which had burned; then the

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barn—two rooms—then at the death of her husband or a little later she had been pushed into the trailer—not even a room. In that way she had been informed of her ultimate space: a coffin. And Graham, the old woman's husband, all his visible remains, all his worldly goods fit into the black box eighteen inches by twelve by twelve. Now she and *her* husband were finishing the barn, opening new space, because they would need it to raise the child. But then, when the child grew, she saw the inevitable contraction ahead, her life space closing down, her living winding tight about her like a cocoon, a casket, a metal box. The baby kicked; her stomach turned.

"They hid a lot from each other, I always thought. In those days married people didn't talk a lot, I guess. A man had his business and a woman had hers. He worked for the railroad, was gone most of the time. She canned, made jelly and jam, kept a garden. She told him what we done wrong and he whipped us for it. When we got bigger he worked up on the place here, building sheds, putting in fences, minding stock. He said he was a rancher, but we was the ones who did the work around the place. When my brother John was big enough, he lit out. I went to work for the railroad like Dad. That was what made me bitter about the old man—that he let me go to work on the railroad without telling me." "Telling you what?" "Telling me what a lie it was to work your life away for eight dollars a day and a gold watch." His thumb crushed a walnut and the kernel fell to yellow dust which he sorted leisurely in the cup of his palm, setting the grains between even teeth she realized now were false. "And your son?" "Well I tried to do my best by him, to let him know about it. I gave him all the money I could, sold this place to put him in school. He's a professional man now, a dentist. I guess he'll know best what to do with his life." He shook his head. "You've got better to do than listen to an old man grouse."

In the metal box of Graham Russell's life there was a small black notebook:

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Dec. 24 1938

J.C. Almond and Family went South and asked us to care for their dog and feed her—They left food for her. We failed to find her Saturday night—So Sunday I looked for her. Monday Evening Dorris discovered the dog locked up in the house—She came and told me about it at 5:50 p.M. and at 6 P.M. Mrs. Peterson called me from Dexter and sed a party called from heare and would not give there name and sed there were a dog locked in a house out hear—I told her I knew about it and iff the family did not come home to night I would free the dog in the morning—

So when I got home from the telephone the dog was out.

When Almond came home I went to him and told him the law on house breaking and allso the Humaine Soc. Law and I used my own name. He asked me who let the dog out I told him I did not know who let the dog out. He told me to mind my own fences.

Colbert jumped all over me about the same affair and sed a certin party told him that I told Whity to have him arrested for House breaking. I promptly told him that It was a lie and asked him who told him and he would not say—So I told him I wanted to know who the party was and that I intended to shut them up, he promised to produce them as soon as Whity came home. then I told him there were someone over there that poped off too much and that I was taking steps to stop them—

Up in the rafters her husband found a dead hummingbird, a tiny bright green puddle of dry feathers pressed against a window. How long had it been there? The eye was neatly excavated by worms, grains of dust like the shatterings of walnuts sifted from the carcass as he moved it in his fingers to demonstrate to her its iridescence.

She had a dream in which she thought she was a fish, swimming in heavy fluids in a dark bowl. Sounds pulsed through her, waves of redness dimly noted, as when a hand is placed over a lightbulb. She curled and uncurled in the sticky trap, wormlike, warmly confined, as clean in the liquids as she would be in her own mouth or the mouth of a giant; then

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realized she was not she but rather some other, perhaps her own child, perhaps Mr. Russell, opening its mouth to scream, the scream swallowed in fluid as the body was suspended, terrifyingly safe. The red sounds shuddered through bones as soft as celluloid and the creature which was still herself as well as the others gasped at its own hand held before it like a cloud before the sun, like milk poured into water, like a dumpling of flesh in rich broth. Swimming, gasping, crying out, she moved through the dark prison, a strong swimmer in a heavy surge, until as swiftly she was she, the bowl, container of the worm that searched exit, and lancing strong pain shot through her belly. And then suddenly *he* was there, watching as she struggled with the worm within, opening herself until her muscles cracked, her mouth broke at its hinges. Into his hands the worm came, into his arms she delivered herself and he smiled and nodded: 'I've helped many a critter, I know about helping . . .'

She fled from the dream to the room's close and dark embrace and saw the old woman watching. *That is why I dreamed*, she realized, even as the hair stood on her scalp. She could not bear to close her eyes. The old woman was at the door of the trailer, concerned, curious, her small stout body bent forward, her white robe dense enough to blot out the moonlight from the window. But now she could see the eyes that had burned the long way across the pasture from the abandoned trailer; dark, firm, not angry, as she had once feared, nor threatening—but demanding. *I want*, the eyes said. *What? What is it you want?* I want. She turned her head, blinked from the strain building in her throat, told the vision to leave. But it would not. So she gave her energy to it, holding the eyes which demanded her energies, stiffening her limbs against the demands. Very slowly, so slowly she perceived the movement of the moonlight over the windowsills, the dead woman faded, resolved to a mist, vanished.

She tried to make a picture of the night, working her tubes of bright pigment into washes of red and blue which she laid over spidery ink sketches suggesting as well as she could with

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hands and eyes the substance of the night. But each new sheet of paper forced itself coarsely and thickly upon the vision, rendering it crude to her eyes, childish and clumsy. As she was burning the soiled papers in the stove, bent over her huge hard belly, she heard the sound of his pickup on the road.

She realized she was afraid. She saw too, in that same instant, that she had never been afraid before, not in the same way. She marveled that she understood, in a flash, that this was so, that this was what was meant by terror.

His cheeks were packed with color like the feathers on a hawk's head and behind lenses his eyes were as imperturbably thoughtful as those of a large and powerful fish. He watched her sit in his mother's rocker as though she were to him something more, and less, than herself. She sipped the coffee she had poured, heated by fear and ill with the visions of the night. Inside her the worm twisted, stabbing with unformed hands, cudgeling with gelatinous feet. Looking at him, she saw that whatever it was had made him come all this time, he knew he was close to having it. His strength like the energy spent in her vision of the old woman, startled and froze her tired and weak. But as she had waited out the old woman, so she would wait him out. She would make a stone of herself, a firm anchored entity, unmovable, fixed. He, if he was indeed bird or fish, would circle and look to enter, but fail. Inside was exactly equivalent to outside; matter was like an onion, layer upon layer, skin enclosing skin, and the layer picked to reside in was arbitrary, futilely won.

But then he stood and came to the rocker where she sat and bent down over her and put his arms around her huge belly and his head down on it and gripped her so she could not move, but felt the stiff bristles of his cheek against and through the fabric of her dress. She could not feel; he moved so blindly, bringing his hands over her breasts to her face, dappling her eyes with his fingers, their rough pads scraping her lids. She could not move; resting against her heavily, he brought his chest onto her knees, his forehead butted her breasts, sending jets of rough pain through their swollenness.

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He breathed like a swimmer rising from water, like an animal after a hard run, and when she struggled and pulled away, when she tried to draw herself up, he gripped with wiry fingers, laying his open mouth against the swelling where the child kicked.

He let her throw him off; so it seemed. He sat back on his heels. He did not appear to understand or care about what he had done. His hands still gripped the armrests of his mother's rocker and she was barred from moving so she sat, stiff and cold, sore, her head blank. His eyes moved over her body like wind testing a tree; she held; there was no escape. He cleared his throat and ducked his chin, then reerected his head with a deep and serious smile to freight his words: "Does your husband know about us?"

A laugh opened her throat but froze in her mouth; she wanted to tell him there was nothing to know, no boundaries had been crossed, the touch was half-forgotten already, a dead act. Then she saw she had been changed; as she could not ever again be empty, so she deluded herself she was untouched. The child inside waited to split her, force her open as he had forced his weight on her; and her revenge was to pretend they had not.

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Lawrence Raab

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF THE PIPE
Homage to Magritte

Sitting down, unfolding
the paper, without looking
you raise the light toward the pipe.
But it's not a pipe, it's a pear.

Surely it was a pipe
only seconds ago.
What might account for this
unusual transformation?
Could it be a sign
of something important?
Can the pear be eaten?

No. The pear's as hard as stone.
In fact it is a stone,
disguised as a pear.

Perhaps the pipe was stolen—
unlikely but possible.
Perhaps the stone pear
can be put to use,
as a paperweight, although
you have no need of one,
or a doorstopper, or some kind
of decorative object.

Then you notice the inscription:
This is not a pear. It's a pipe.

And everything is clear.

René Magritte *Wm. N. Copley Collection*

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Richard Stull

MY FOLLY

I am convinced of my true behavior—
How my impulse at certain times unfolds
like a hand limping over a railroad track;
Or when my wife runs through the room
and I hear a faint pulsing trail after her
like an elephant hopping on a tuning fork.
And sometimes I hear the same sort of thing
when other women are around me.

Yet I am a recluse by habit.
I keep the white hair hidden in my study
so while I am with friends, in the public eye,
I am jubilant and slightly unanswerable.
But in my cozy rattan chair I will suddenly
disappear in a gag of smoke, glancing out
like a cricket in a basket of newly washed clothes.

Some nights I move stealthfully in the darkness,
feeling my way among the chairs,
crushing the carpet soundlessly beneath my feet,
touching the lamp, remembering it for the future.
Then in my inhuman bravery I crouch by the side of her bed.
Gently I pull back the mosquito netting.
We are so close now the molecules of our breath
must, when they meet, go traveling off through space
arm in arm.
I kiss her parted lips. Will nothing wake her?
I assail her eyelids, cheeks; I devour her throat.
I am a madman. But now I must retreat hastily, content
with the secret bond of our shattering folly.

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In the morning I am as happy as a fart in a skillet.
I know she knows. Her aloofness drives me wild.
I wait for her behind the door and surprise her
with another embrace of my naked arms.
She is mystical, this woman, as romantic as high society.
As if she doesn't know. . . .
And as I watch her leave the throbbing of the Congo
consumes me. But again I compose myself
and stroll back to my cabin for a late morning cheroot.
She'll see. I will take this love calmly like a man.

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Two Poems by Albert Stainton

THE MAN WITH THE LEPIDOPTERA ON HIS ASS

stands, face to the wall,
butterfly to the camera, needled
back there forty years ago.
A butterfly, not a heart,
a snake, an eagle, some low joke
like Government Inspected Meat,
or a banner unfurling a slogan
proudly across the mesial groove.
The ass-muscles sag like a sling
but those glorious membranous wings
expand all the more extravagantly—
those segmented patterns of color
dilate, etherialize as the pigments decay.
The clubbed antennae still sprout
tentatively from the base of the spine,
the lobes of the blue hind wings
nearly touch the legs. The forewings
spread over the buttocks, as he keeps
his face to the wall, his ass to his audience,
smiling, as if that indelible fantasy
could winnow him out to the stars.

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THE SALE OF YOUR DREAMS

features Oriental rugs for $15—
some only slightly bald in the center
some unraveling at the weave end,
features ceramic hanging pots
that outdo one another in deformity
of glaze, features copper tubing
for considerably less than
hardware store prices, features
washable cloth children's books
and a used Bendix to wash
them in, wash them every week
with your tie-dyed brassieres,
which are also for sale, but
what's best of all are the box-spring-
mattress combinations going for
$9.95, complete—yes, complete—
mattresses from mansions, mattresses
from motels, from resorts on either
coast, from the dorms of
failing colleges, from hospitals,
insane asylums, progressive prisons,
drug rehabilitation centers, brothels,
barracks, YM and YWCA's—mattresses
with stripes of clashing colors,
harlequin diamonds, octagons,
purple petunias, amaranths, flattened
daisies, mattresses with phosphorescent
bodies that shimmer in the dark—
so many different mattresses, and
so many of each kind, that the
sale could go on indefinitely
and everyone could still get any
or as many of these mattresses
as he or she may want.

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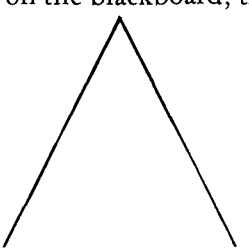
David Fisher

THE TEACHER

When I was a teacher
I taught the truth, viz.,
"The two great levelers are
Pestilence and Disease," and then
a few days later I would ask the students
what the two great levelers are,
and they would answer, "Disease
and Pestilence," and I would lose
my temper, and roar, "No, that
is wrong, it is Pestilence and Disease."
They were hopeless. And I would teach them
the structure of tragedy, and I would
diagram the structure on the blackboard, thus:



They did not understand, some
did not even copy down the diagram.

*

I have retired, now, to my father's
small stump farm. I eat cress, berries,
cattail sprouts, and chives, but mostly
mushrooms: orange chanterelles and

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Zeller's boletus that I gather
in gunny sacks. I fry them, boil them,
broil them, pickle them, and
eat them raw. They make me somewhat dizzy.
I wear a miner's helmet to bed.
Still I have bad dreams.

*

The hogs crowd around the stove,
a possum hangs from the hall tree.
Under the cabin, goats browse
the dynamite.

A new spring came up in a field
and I took a shovel
and I tried to coax it
nearer the house, but it dived
down a badger hole and disappeared.

*

I have put up chintz curtains. In the
appalling heat, under the socket moon, I worm
the corn. When I was a student, I went
to Wales, to Mynydd Llanybyther, and Cwmpidlfach,
I stayed with Thurlow Craig, who told me
country stories, of the dance of the stoats,
of rooks who breed on the midden, of the fox
who played dead to catch the buzzard.
At night we visited the local, in a cart
drawn by a pedigreed Cardigan cob.

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I make my own beer now, with
good English malt, I add the hops
in an old stocking my wife left. Sometimes
the hydrometer tells me it is thirty proof,
sometimes, in the moonlight,
a bottle explodes, rattling the windows.

*

Winter is coming.
The landscape is set forth
like the best blue china.

A young frost makes her
first sketches on the
panes of my cabin.

Someday I should like to teach again.

Outside, on the cold roof of my Nash,
I hear the frosty clatter of goat hooves.

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Two Poems by G.S. Sharat Chandra

THE THREE MISERIES

This is the key to misery
It opens its miserable door
Attendants glum & gloom greet you half way
You bring your fears you call a number
They provide the tissues

This other key is for the inner chamber
Of advanced misery
Attendants manic & morose clutch your arms
The three of you are inseparable
You dance the ring around the rosy doom

Yet the sacred of all miseries
Is the utmost misery
There are no attendants no door no key
You get there by your mastery
Of misery and advanced misery

You sink on its throne
On its magnificent throne

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ADAM & EVE

In the Indo-Persian miniatures collected by Maurice Dimand,
There's a painting from the series, *The Description of Animals.*
This has two purple birds
Cackling like jays on top of a skinny plant.
There's no other bird, animal or insect
The rest of the painting being dominated
By two short, disproportionate figures
With fool's gold haloes.
The man wears his hair in an indian knot,
Derives his moustache from a chinese bhikku,
His beard from a scroungy pencil.
The woman exposes a flat breast with no mark of nipple,
Giant cucumber thighs grown into gourds,
Head of a scalped coconut.
Behind her massive torso emerge braided strands of hair
That snarl at her feet.
They're simply heightless, buttless, pointless.
Although one is positive they're not animals,
One cannot help thinking they're also not Adam & Eve
But perhaps the first man and woman
Reared by a midget trainer
To provide gainful employment for visiting Persian artists
Who desired a touch of oriental grandeur.
Since exposure of sex is against native better judgment
The artist simply brushed them out.
If Adam & Eve looked like these two
Not only would God have thrown them out of his elusive garden
But you and I would have kept vigil on our own backyard.
Yet the painting is worth having for two reasons:
It proves that God had no taste for clay jobs,
Didn't try out a few dolls before executing the originals.
Our ancestors were surely the magnificent apes
With resplendent hair,
Openings and closings for sex,
And we ought to be thankful it turned out that way.

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William Burtis

ACAPULCO RUBRIC

"The contemplation of horror is not edifying;
neither does it strengthen the soul."
—Anthony Hecht, The Hard Hours

At one time, under this same title,
I told the whole story of the kidnapped girl
and her Mexican tortures.
It was intended to teach everyone a lesson.
But now . . . well, let me be brief:

The local police once invited a friend
to take a peek at some confiscated skin flicks
and accidentally treated him to a real horror,
in which a young white girl, evidently American,
is chained to a wall while

"small Mexican hands wait
for the pink flames of her nipples to rise
into the hot, ready mouths of pliers.
The whip begins, tearing her
mother-and-father white flanks open for the camera.
She goes limp in the final arms of her vacation,
mumbles into telephones, gives up urine like a flag. . . ."

But enough. Suffice it to say
she was beautiful, and brought sensationally to death
for the fat black market money of impotent old men,
and that my friend was mercilessly badgered
by those in the bar, and told the whole story.

And I wrote it down, feeling that—but what
does it matter? I guess it has its message,
that no good comes from telling bad stories.

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for instance I seduced his wife?

Eon was

Abramowitz, out for a ~~walk~~ soup in the fields, looks upon beauty bare? There is this naked lady lying asleep in the grass of a valley

What happens to Abramowitz?

[Instead of nibbling love we've been murdered, or at least assaulted. Who is this lady and is she married or not. Then if she was married or not the] He drops his pants and gets on to it; they both enjoy the enjoying act; but when he gets off, wondering at his prowess, the lady dreams and he takes off, walking, realizing before he has gone very far, from his pockets and the noise of his pounding hooves that he has been changed into a horse, and the lady is a mare [beginning [a good search] ~~a good search~~ responding to the family.]

From the first draft of "Talking Horse" by Bernard Malamud

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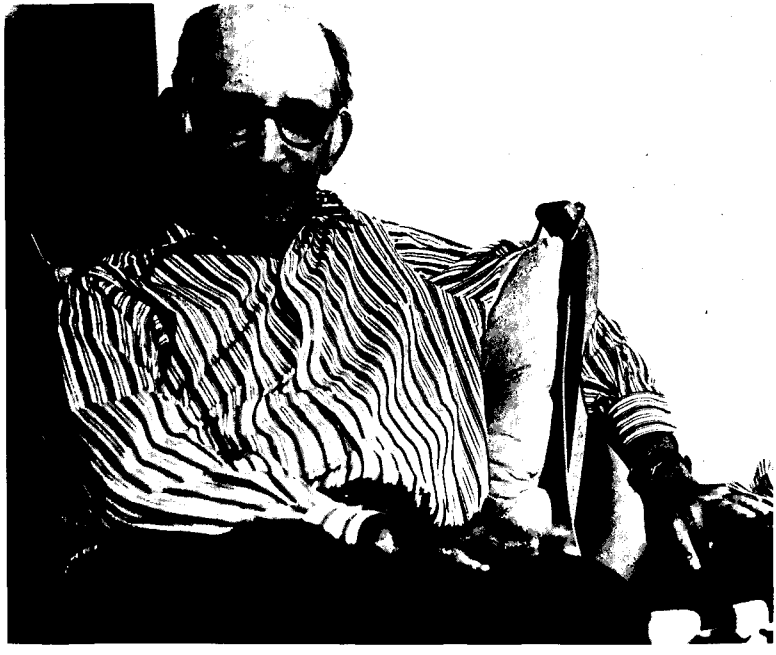
The Art of Fiction LII

Bernard Malamud



Barbara Pfeffer

Bernard Malamud lives in a white clapboard house in Bennington, Vermont. Spacious and comfortable, it sits on a gentle downward slope, behind it the rise of the Green Mountains. To this house on April 26, 1974, came friends, family, colleagues and the children of friends—to celebrate Malamud's sixtieth birthday. It was a sunny weekend, the weather and ambience, benign, friendly.

There were about a half dozen young people taking their rest in sleeping bags in various bedrooms and in a home volunteered by a friend and neighbor. Three of them, from nearby universities, were children of friends on the faculty of Oregon State University more than a dozen years ago.

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On Saturday night there was a birthday party, with champagne, birthday cake and dancing. At the end of the evening the young people drummed up a show of slides: scenes of past travels; in particular, scenes of Corvallis, Oregon, where Malamud had lived and taught for 12 years before returning East.

Bernard Malamud is a slender man with a greying mustache and inquisitive brown eyes that search and hide a little at the same time. He is a quiet man who listens a lot, and responds freely. His wife, Anne, an attractive, articulate woman of Italian descent, had planned the party, assisted by the young people from Oregon, and the Malamuds' son, Paul, and daughter, Janna.

The taping of the interview began late Friday morning, on the back porch which overlooks a long descending sweep of lawn and, in the distance, the encircling mountains. It was continued, later, in the book-filled study where Malamud writes. (He also writes in his office at Bennington College.) At first he was conscious of the tape-recorder, but grew less so as the session—and the weekend—continued. He has a quick laugh and found it easy to discourse on the questions asked. An ironic humor would seem to be his mother tongue.

INTERVIEWER

Why sixty? I understand that when *The Paris Review* asked you to do an interview after the publication of *The Fixer* you suggested doing it when you hit sixty?

MALAMUD

Right. It's a respectable round number and when it becomes your age you look at it with both eyes. It's a good time to see from. In the past I sometimes resisted interviews because I had no desire to talk about myself in relation to my fiction. There are people who always want to make you a character in your stories and want you to confirm it. Of course there's some truth

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to it: Every character you invent takes his essence from you; therefore you're in them as Flaubert was in Emma—but, peace to him, you are not those you imagine. They are your fictions. And I don't like questions of explication: What did I mean by this or that?—I want the books to speak for themselves. You can read?—all right, tell me what my books mean. Astonish me.

INTERVIEWER

What about a little personal history? There's been little written about your life.

MALAMUD

That's how I wanted it—I like privacy and as much as possible to stay out of my books. I know that's disadvantageous to certain legitimate kinds of criticism of literature, but my needs come first. Still I have here and there talked a little about my life: My father was a grocer; my mother, who helped him, after a long illness, died young. I had a younger brother who lived a hard and lonely life and died in his fifties. My mother and father were gentle, honest, kindly people, and who they were and their affection for me to some degree made up for the cultural deprivation I felt as a child. They weren't educated but their values were stable. Though my father always managed to make a living they were comparatively poor, especially in the Depression, and yet I never heard a word in praise of the buck. On the other hand, there were no books that I remember in the house, no records, music, pictures on the wall. On Sundays I listened to somebody's piano through the window. At nine I caught pneumonia and when I was convalescing my father bought me *The Book of Knowledge*, twenty volumes where there had been none. That was, considering the circumstances, an act of great generosity. When I was in high school he bought a radio. As a kid, for entertainment I turned to the movies and dime novels. Maybe *The Natural* derives from Frank Merriwell as well as the adventures of the Brooklyn Dodgers in Ebbets Field. Anyway, my parents stayed close to

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the store. Once in a while, on Jewish holidays, we went visiting, or saw a Jewish play—Sholem Aleichem, Peretz, and others. My mother's brother, Charles Fidelman, and their cousin, Isidore Cashier, were in the Yiddish theatre.

Around the neighborhood the kids played Chase the White Horse, Ringolevio, Buck-Buck, punchball and one o'cat. Occasionally we stole tomatoes from the Italian dirt farmers, gypped the El to ride to Coney Island, smoked in cellars and played blackjack. I wore sneakers every summer. My education at home derived mostly from the presence and example of good, feelingful, hardworking people. They were worriers, with other faults I wasn't much conscious of until I recognized them in myself. I learned from books, in the public schools. I had some fine teachers in grammar school, Erasmus Hall High School, and later in City College, in New York. I took to literature and early wanted to be a writer.

INTERVIEWER

How early?

MALAMUD

At eight or nine I was writing little stories in school and feeling the glow. To anyone of my friends who'd listen I'd recapitulate at tedious length the story of the last movie I'd seen. The movies tickled my imagination. As a writer I learned from Charlie Chaplin.

INTERVIEWER

What in particular?

MALAMUD

Let's say the rhythm, the snap of comedy; the reserved comic presence—that beautiful distancing; the funny with sad; the surprise of surprise.

INTERVIEWER

Please go on about your life.

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MALAMUD

Schools meant a lot to me, those I went to and taught at. You learn what you teach and you learn from those you teach. In 1942 I met my wife and we were married in 1945. We have two children and have lived in Oregon, Rome, Bennington, Cambridge, London, New York, and have traveled a fair amount. In sum, once I was twenty and not so young, now I'm sixty inclined on the young side.

INTERVIEWER

Which means?

MALAMUD

Largely, the life of imagination, and doing pretty much what I set out to do. I made my mistakes, took my lumps, learned. I resisted my ignorance, limitations, obsessions. I'm freer than I was. I'd rather write it than talk. I love the privileges of form.

INTERVIEWER

You've taught during the time you were a professional writer?

MALAMUD

Thirty-five years—

INTERVIEWER

There are some who say teaching doesn't do the writer much good; in fact it restricts life and homogenizes experience. Isn't a writer better off on the staff of *The New Yorker*, or working for the BBC? Faulkner fed a furnace and wrote for the movies.

MALAMUD

Doesn't it depend on the writer? People experience similar things differently. Sometimes I've regretted the time I've given to teaching but not teaching itself. And a community of serious readers is a miraculous thing. Some of the most extra-

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ordinary people I've met were students of mine, or colleagues. Still I ought to say I teach only a single class of prose fiction, one term a year. I've taught since I was twenty-five and though I need more time for reading and writing I also want to keep on doing what I can do well and enjoy doing.

INTERVIEWER

Do you teach literature?

MALAMUD

If you teach prose fiction you are teaching literature. You teach those who want to write to read fiction, even their own work, with greater understanding. Sometimes they're suprised to find out how much they've said or not said that they didn't know they had.

INTERVIEWER

Can one, indeed, teach writing?

MALAMUD

You teach writers—assuming a talent. At the beginning young writers pour it out without much knowing the nature of their talent. What you try to do is hold a mirror up to their fiction so, in a sense, they can see what they're showing. Not all who come forth are fully armed. Some are gifted in narrative, some shun it. Some show a richness of metaphor, some have to dig for it. Some writers think language is all they need; they mistake it for subject matter. Some rely on whimsy. Some on gut feeling. Some of them don't make the effort to create a significant form. They do automatic writing and think they're probing themselves. The odd thing is most young writers write traditional narrative until you introduce them to the experimental writers—not for experiment's sake, but to try something for size. Let the writer attempt whatever he can. There's no telling where he will come out stronger than before. Art is in life but the realm is endless.

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INTERVIEWER

Experiment at the beginning?

MALAMUD

Sometimes a new technique excites a flood of fictional ideas. Some, after experimenting, realize their strength is in traditional modes. Some, after trying several things, may give up the thought of writing fiction—not a bad thing. Writing—the problems, the commitment, the effort, scares them. Some may decide to try poetry or criticism. Some turn to painting—why not? I have no kick against those who use writing, or another art, to test themselves, to find themselves. Sometimes I have to tell them their talents are thin—not to waste their lives writing third-rate fiction.

INTERVIEWER

Fidelman as a painter? The doubtful talent?

MALAMUD

Yes. Among other things it is a book about finding a vocation. Forgive the soft impeachment.

INTERVIEWER

In *Fidelman* and *The Tenants* you deal with artists who can't produce, or produce badly. Why does the subject interest you so much? Have you ever been blocked?

MALAMUD

Never. Even in anxiety I've written, though anxiety, because it is monochromatic, may limit effects. I like the drama of non-productivity, especially where there may be talent. It's an interesting ambiguity: the force of the creative versus the paralysis caused by the insults, the confusions of life.

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INTERVIEWER

What about work habits? Some writers, especially at the beginning, have problems settling how to do it.

MALAMUD

There's no one way—there's so much drivel about this subject. You're who you are, not Fitzgerald or Thomas Wolfe. You write by sitting down and writing. There's no particular time or place—you suit yourself, your nature. How one works, assuming he's disciplined, doesn't matter. If he or she is not disciplined, no sympathetic magic will help. The trick is to make time—not steal it—and produce the fiction. If the stories come, you get them written, you're on the right track. Eventually everyone learns his or her own best way. The real mystery to crack is you.

INTERVIEWER

What about the number of drafts? Some writers write only one.

MALAMUD

They're cheating themselves. First drafts are for learning what your novel or story is about. Revision is working with that knowledge to enlarge and enhance an idea, to re-form it. D.H. Lawrence, for instance, did seven or eight drafts of *The Rainbow*. The first draft of a book is the most uncertain—where you need guts, the ability to accept the imperfect until it is better. Revision is one of the true pleasures of writing. "The men and things of today are wont to lie fairer and truer in tomorrow's memory," Thoreau said.

INTERVIEWER

Do you teach your own writing?

MALAMUD

No, I teach what I know about writing.

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INTERVIEWER

What specific piece of advice would you give to young writers?

MALAMUD

Write your heart out.

INTERVIEWER

Anything else?

MALAMUD

Watch out for self-deceit in fiction. Write truthfully but with cunning.

INTERVIEWER

Anything special to more experienced types?

MALAMUD

To any writer: Teach yourself to work in uncertainty. Many writers are anxious when they begin, or try something new. Even Matisse painted some of his fauvist pictures in anxiety. Maybe that helped him to simplify. Character, discipline, negative capability count. Write, complete, revise. If it doesn't work begin something else.

INTERVIEWER

And if it doesn't work twenty or thirty times?

MALAMUD

You live your life as best you can.

INTERVIEWER

I've heard you talk about the importance of subject matter?

MALAMUD

It's always a problem. Very young writers who don't know themselves obviously often don't know what they have to say.

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Sometimes by staying with it they write themselves into a fairly rich vein. Some, by the time they find what they're capable of writing about, no longer want to write. Some go through psychoanalysis or a job in a paint factory and begin to write again. One hopes they then have something worth saying. Nothing is guaranteed. Some writers have problems with subject matter not in their first book, which may mine childhood experience, or an obsession, or fantasy, or the story they've carried in their minds and imagination to this point, but after that—after this first yield—often they run into trouble with their next few books. Especially if the first book is unfortunately a best seller. And some writers run into difficulties at the end, particularly if they exclude important areas of personal experience from their writing. Hemingway would not touch his family beyond glimpses in short stories, mostly the Nick Adams pieces. He once wrote his brother that their mother was a bitch and father a suicide—who'd want to read about them? Obviously not all his experience is available to a writer for purposes of fiction, but I feel that if Hemingway had tried during his last five years, let's say, to write about his father rather than the bulls once more, or the big fish, he mightn't have committed suicide. Mailer, after *The Naked and the Dead*, ran into trouble he couldn't resolve until he invented his mirror-image, Aquarius, Prisoner of Sex, Döppelgänger, without whom he can't write. After he had invented "Norman Mailer" he produced *The Armies of the Night*, a beautiful feat of prestidigitation, if not fiction. He has still to write, Richard Poirier says, his *Moby Dick*. To write a good big novel he will have to invent other selves, richly felt selves. Roth, since *Portnoy*, has been hunting for a fruitful subject. He's tried various strategies to defeat the obsession of the hated wife he almost never ceases to write about. He'll have at last to bury her to come up with a new comedy.

INTERVIEWER

What about yourself?

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MALAMUD

I say the same thing in different worlds.

INTERVIEWER

Anything else to say to writers—basic stuff?

MALAMUD

Take chances. "Dare to do," Eudora Welty says. She's right. One drags around a bag of fears he has to throw to the winds every so often if he expects to take off in his writing. I'm glad Virginia Woolf did *Orlando*, though it isn't my favorite of her books, and in essence she was avoiding a subject. Still, you don't have to tell everything you know. I like Updike's *Centaur*, Bellow's *Henderson*. Genius, after it has got itself together, may give out with a *Ulysses* or *Remembrance of Things Past*. One doesn't have to imitate the devices of Joyce or Proust, but if you're not a genius imitate the daring. If you are a genius assert yourself, in art and humanity.

INTERVIEWER

Humanity? Are you suggesting art is moral?

MALAMUD

It tends toward morality. It values life. Even when it doesn't it tends to. My former colleague, Stanley Edgar Hyman, used to say that even the act of creating a form is a moral act. That leaves out something, but I understand and like what he was driving at. It's close to Frost's definition of a poem as "a momentary stay against confusion." Morality begins with an awareness of the sanctity of one's life, hence the lives of others—even Hitler's to begin with—the sheer privilege of being, in this miraculous cosmos, and trying to figure out why. Art, in essence, celebrates life and gives us our measure.

INTERVIEWER

It changes the world?

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MALAMUD

It changes me. It affirms me.

INTERVIEWER

Really?

MALAMUD

(*laughs*) It helps.

INTERVIEWER

Let's get to your books. In *The Natural*, why the baseball-mythology combination?

MALAMUD

Baseball flat is baseball flat. I had to do something else to enrich the subject. I love metaphor. It provides two loaves where there seems to be one. Sometimes it throws in a load of fish. The mythological analogy is a system of metaphor. It enriches the vision without resorting to montage. This guy gets up with his baseball bat and all at once he is, through the ages, a knight—somewhat battered—with a lance; not to mention a guy with a blackjack, or someone attempting murder with a flower. You relate to the past and predict the future. I'm not talented as a conceptual thinker but I am in the uses of metaphor. The mythological and symbolic excite my imagination. Incidentally, Keats said: "I am not a conceptual thinker, I am a man of ideas."

INTERVIEWER

Is *The Assistant* mythological?

MALAMUD

Some, I understand, find it so.

INTERVIEWER

Did you set it up as a mythology?

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MALAMUD

No. If it's mythological to some readers I have no objection. You read the book and write your ticket. I can't tell you how the words fall, though I know what I mean. Your interpretation—*pace*, S. Sontag—may enrich the book or denude it. All I ask is that it be consistent and make sense.

INTERVIEWER

Is it a moral allegory?

MALAMUD

You have to squeeze your brain to come up with that. The spirit is more than moral and by the same token there's more than morality in a good man. One must make room in those he creates. So far as range is concerned, ultimately a writer's mind and heart, if any, are revealed in his fiction.

INTERVIEWER

What is the source of *The Assistant*?

MALAMUD

Source questions are piddling but you're my friend so I'll tell you. Mostly my father's life as a grocer, though not necessarily my father. Plus three short stories, sort of annealed in a single narrative: "The Cost of Living" and "The First Seven Years"—both in *The Magic Barrel*. And a story I wrote in the forties, "The Place is Different Now," which I've not included in my story collections.

INTERVIEWER

Is *The Fixer* also related to your father's life?

MALAMUD

Indirectly. My father told me the Mendel Beilis story when I was a kid. I carried it around almost forty years and decided to use it after I gave up the idea of a Sacco and Vanzetti novel.

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When I began to read for the Sacco and Vanzetti it had all the quality of a structured fiction, all the necessary elements of theme and narrative. I couldn't see any way of re-forming it. I was very much interested in the idea of prison as a source of the self's freedom and thought of Dreyfus next, but he was a dullish man, and though he endured well he did not suffer well. Neither did Beilis for that matter but his drama was more interesting—his experiences; so I invented Yakov Bok, with perhaps the thought of him as a potential Vanzetti. Beilis, incidentally, died a bitter man, in New York—after leaving Palestine, because he thought he hadn't been adequately reimbursed for his suffering.

INTERVIEWER

Some critics have commented on this prison motif in your work.

MALAMUD

Perhaps I use it as a metaphor for the dilemma of all men: necessity, whose bars we look through and try not to see. Social injustice, apathy, ignorance. The personal prison of entrapment in past experience, guilt, obsession—the somewhat blind or blinded self, in other words. A man has to construct, invent, his freedom. Imagination helps. A truly great man or woman extends it for others in the process of creating his/her own.

INTERVIEWER

Does this idea or theme, as you call it, come out of your experience as a Jew?

MALAMUD

That's probably in it—a heightened sense of prisoner of history, but there's more to it than that. I conceive this as the major battle in life, to transcend the self—extend one's realm of freedom.

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INTERVIEWER

Not all your characters do.

MALAMUD

Obviously. But they're all more or less engaged in the enterprise.

INTERVIEWER

Humor is so much a part of your work. Is this an easy quality to deal with? Is one problem that the response to humor is so much a question of individual taste?

MALAMUD

The funny bone is universal. I doubt humorists think of individual taste when they're enticing the laugh. With me humor comes unexpectedly, usually in defense of a character, sometimes because I need cheering up. When something starts funny I can feel my imagination eating and running. I love the distancing—the guise of invention—that humor gives fiction. Comedy, I imagine, is harder to do consistently than tragedy, but I like it spiced in the wine of sadness.

INTERVIEWER

What about suffering? It's a subject much in your early work.

MALAMUD

I'm against it but when it occurs why waste the experience?

INTERVIEWER

Are you a Jewish writer?

MALAMUD

What is the question asking?

INTERVIEWER

One hears various definitions and insistences, for instance,

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that one is primarily a writer and any subject matter is secondary; or that one is an American-Jewish writer. There are qualifications, by Bellow, Roth, others.

MALAMUD

I'm an American, I'm a Jew, and I write for all men. A novelist has to or he's built himself a cage. I write about Jews, when I write about Jews, because they set my imagination going. I know something about their history, the quality of their experience and belief, and of their literature, though not as much as I would like. Like many writers I'm influenced especially by the Bible, both Testaments. I respond in particular to the East European immigrants of my father's and mother's generation; many of them were Jews of the Pale as described by the classic Yiddish writers. And of course I've been deeply moved by the Jews of the concentration camps, and the refugees wandering from nowhere to nowhere. I'm concerned about Israel. Nevertheless, Jews like Rabbis Kahane and Korrf set my teeth on edge. Sometimes I make characters Jewish because I think I will understand them better as people, not because I am out to prove anything. That's a qualification. Still another is that I know that, as a writer, I've been influenced by Hawthorne, James, Mark Twain, Hemingway, more than I have been by Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz, whom I read with pleasure. Of course I admire and have been moved by other writers, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov, for instance, but the point I'm making is that I was born in America and respond, in American life, to more than Jewish experience. I wrote for those who read.

INTERVIEWER

Thus S. Levin is Jewish and not much is made of it?

MALAMUD

He was a gent who interested me in a place that interested me. He was out to be educated.

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INTERVIEWER

Occasionally I see a remark to the effect that he has more than a spoonful of you in him.

MALAMUD

So have Roy Hobbs, Helen Bober, Willie Spearmint and Talking Horse. More to the point—I prefer autobiographical essence to autobiographical history. Events from life may creep into the narrative but it isn't necessarily my life history.

INTERVIEWER

How much of a book is set in your mind when you begin? Do you begin at the beginning? Does its course ever change markedly from what you had in the original concept?

MALAMUD

When I start I have a pretty well developed idea what the book is about and how it ought to go, because generally I've been thinking about it and making notes for months if not years. Generally I have the ending in mind, usually the last paragraph almost verbatim. I begin at the beginning and stay close to the track, if it is a track and not a whalepath. If it turns out I'm in the open sea, my compass is my narrative instinct, with an assist by that astrolabe, theme. The destination, wherever it is, is, as I said, already defined. If I go astray it's not a long excursis, good for getting to know the ocean if not the world. The original idea, altered but recognizable, on the whole remains.

INTERVIEWER

Do characters ever run away from you and take on identities you hadn't expected?

MALAMUD

My characters run away but not far. Their guise is surprises.

INTERVIEWER

Let's go to Fidelman. You seem to like to write about painters?

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MALAMUD

I know a few. I love painting.

INTERVIEWER

Rembrandt and who else?

MALAMUD

Too many to name, but Cezanne, Monet, and Matisse, very much, among Modernists.

INTERVIEWER

Chagall?

MALAMUD

Not that much. He rides his nostalgic nag to death.

INTERVIEWER

Some have called you a Chagallean writer.

MALAMUD

Their problem. I used Chagallean imagery intentionally in one story, "The Magic Barrel," and that's it. My quality is not much like his.

INTERVIEWER

Fidelman first appears in "The Last Mohican," a short story. Did you already have in mind that there would be an extended work on him?

MALAMUD

After I wrote the story in Rome I jotted down ideas for several incidents in the form of a picaresque novel. I was out to loosen up—experiment a little—with narrative structure. And I wanted to see, if I wrote it at intervals—as I did from 1957 to 1968—whether the passing of time and mores would influence his life. I did not think of the narrative as merely a series of related stories because almost at once I had the structure of a

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novel in mind and each part had to fit that form. Robert Scholes in *The Saturday Review* has best explained what I was up to in Fidelman.

INTERVIEWER

Did you use all the incidents you jotted down?

MALAMUD

No.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give me an example of one you left out?

MALAMUD

Yes, Fidelman administering to the dying Keats in Rome—doing Severn's job, one of the few times in his life our boy is engaged in a purely unselfish act, or acts. But I felt I had no need to predict a change in him, especially in a sort of dream sequence, so I dropped the idea. The painting element was to come in via some feverish watercolors of John Keats, dying.

INTERVIEWER

Fidelman is characterized by some critics as a schlemiel.

MALAMUD

Not accurately. Peter Schlemiel lost his shadow and suffered the consequences for all time. Not Fidelman. He does better. He escapes his worst fate. I dislike the schlemiel characterization as a taxonomical device. I said somewhere that it reduces to stereotypes people of complex motivations and fates. One can often behave like a schlemiel without being one.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read criticism of your work?

MALAMUD

When it hits me in the eye, even some reviews.

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INTERVIEWER

Does it affect you?

MALAMUD

Some of it must. Not the crap, the self-serving pieces, but an occasional insightful criticism, favorable or unfavorable, that confirms my judgment of my work. While I'm on the subject, I dislike particularly those critics who preach their esthetic or ideological doctrines at you. What's important to them is not what the writer has done but how it fits, or doesn't fit, the thesis they want to develop. Nobody can tell a writer what can or ought to be done, or not done, in his fiction. A living death if you fall for it.

INTERVIEWER

That narration, for instance, is dead or dying?

MALAMUD

It'll be dead when the penis is.

INTERVIEWER

What about the death of the novel?

MALAMUD

The novel could disappear but it won't die.

INTERVIEWER

How does that go?

MALAMUD

I'm not saying it will disappear, just entertaining the idea. Assume it does; then someday a talented writer writes himself a long heartfelt letter and the form reappears. The human race needs the novel. We need all the experience we can get. Those who say the novel is dead can't write them.

INTERVIEWER

You've done two short stories and a novel about blacks. Where do you get your material?

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MALAMUD

Experience and books. I lived on the edge of a black neighborhood in Brooklyn when I was a boy. I played with blacks in the Flatbush Boys Club. I had a friend—Buster; we used to go to his house every so often. I swiped dimes so we could go to the movies together on a couple of Saturday afternoons. After I was married I taught for a year in a black evening high school in Harlem. The short stories derive from that period. I also read black fiction and history.

INTERVIEWER

What set off *The Tenants*?

MALAMUD

Jews and blacks, the period of the troubles in New York City; the teachers strike, the rise of black activism, the mix-up of cause and effect. I thought I'd say a word.

INTERVIEWER

Why the three endings?

MALAMUD

Because one wouldn't do.

INTERVIEWER

Will you predict how it will be between blacks and Jews in the future?

MALAMUD

How can one? All I know is that American blacks have been badly treated. We, as a society, have to redress the balance. Those who want for others must expect to give up something. What we get in return is the affirmation of what we believe in.

INTERVIEWER

You give a sense in your fiction that you try not to repeat yourself?

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MALAMUD

Good. In my books I go along the same paths in different worlds.

INTERVIEWER

What's the path—theme?

MALAMUD

Derived from one's sense of values, it's a vision of life, a feeling for people—real qualities in imaginary worlds.

INTERVIEWER

Do you like writing short stories more than you do novels?

MALAMUD

Just as much, though the short story has its own pleasures. I like packing a self or two into a few pages, predicating lifetimes. The drama is terse, happens faster, and is often outlandish. A short story is a way of indicating the complexity of life in a few pages, producing the surprise and effect of a profound knowledge in a short time. There's, among other things, a drama, a resonance, of the reconciliation of opposites: much to say, little time to say it, something like the effect of a poem.

INTERVIEWER

You write them between novels?

MALAMUD

Yes, to breathe, and give myself time to think what's in the next book. Sometimes I'll try out a character or situation similar to that in a new novel.

INTERVIEWER

How many drafts do you usually do of a novel?

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MALAMUD

Many more than I call three. Usually the last of the first puts it in place. The second focuses, develops, subtilizes. By the third most of the dross is gone. I work with language. I love the flowers of afterthought.

INTERVIEWER

Your style has always seemed so individual, so recognizable. Is this a natural gift, or is it contrived and honed?

MALAMUD

My style flows from the fingers. The eye and ear approve or amend.

INTERVIEWER

Let's wind up. Are you optimistic about the future?

MALAMUD

My nature is optimistic but not the evidence—population misery, famine, politics of desperation, the proliferation of the atom bomb. Mylai, one minute after Hiroshima in history, was ordained. We're going through long, involved, transformations of world society, ongoing upheavals of colonialism, old modes of distribution, mores, overthrowing the slave mentality. With luck we may end up in a society with a larger share of the world's goods, opportunities for education, freedom, going to the presently underprivileged. Without luck there may be a vast economic redistribution without political freedom. In the Soviet Union, as it is presently constituted, that's meant the kiss of death to freedom in art and literature. I worry that democracy which has protected us from this indignity, especially in the United States, suffers from a terrifying inadequacy of leadership, and the apathy, unimaginativeness, and hard-core selfishness of too many of us. I worry about technology rampant. I fear those who are by nature beastly.

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INTERVIEWER

What does one write novels about nowadays?

MALAMUD

Whatever wants to be written.

INTERVIEWER

Is there something I haven't asked you that you might want to comment on?

MALAMUD

No.

INTERVIEWER

For instance, what writing has meant to you?

MALAMUD

I'd be too moved to say.

—DANIEL STERN

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Richard Wilbur

PICCOLA COMMEDIA

He is no one I really know,
The sun-charred, gaunt young man
By the highway's edge in Kansas
Thirty-odd years ago.

On a tourist-cabin veranda
Two middle-aged women sat;
One, in a white dress, fat,
With a rattling glass in her hand,

Called "Son, don't you feel the heat?
Get up here into the shade."
Like a good boy, I obeyed,
And was given a crate for a seat

And an Orange Crush and gin.
"This state," she said, "is hell."
Her thin friend cackled, "Well, dear,
You've gotta fight sin with sin."

"No harm in a drink; my stars!"
Said the fat one, jerking her head.
"And I'll take no lip from Ed,
Him with his damn cigars."

Laughter. A combine whined
On past, and dry grass bent
In the backwash; liquor went
Like an ice-pick into my mind.

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Beneath her skirt I spied
Two sea-cows on a floe.
"Go talk to Lucy Jo, son,
She's reading a book inside."

As I gangled in at the door
A pink girl, curled in a chair,
Looked up with an ingénue stare.
Screenland lay on the floor.

Amazed by her starlet's pout
And the way her eyebrows arched,
I felt both drowned and parched.
Desire leapt up like a trout.

"Hello," she said, and her gum
Gave a calculating crack.
At once, from the lightless back
Of the room there came the grumble

Of someone heaving from bed,
A Zippo's click and flare,
Then, more and more apparent,
The shuffling form of Ed,

Who neither looked nor spoke
But moved in profile by,
Blinking one gelid eye
In his elected smoke.

This is something I've never told,
And some of it I forget.
But the heat! I can feel it yet,
And that conniving cold.

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Peter Viereck

TWO TOMBWOMB POEMS

HONORED GUEST*

"Earth receives an honored guest"
—Auden

Guest night. Breath-taking games and—spending.
I play hand-rubbing host, you guest condescending.

"Roll-call, roll-call, want to poll
Guest whims? Mine is: stretch and loll."

Can be arranged. First sign my scroll.
Ignore that digging. Just some mole.

"Is it to plant some tree, that hole?
To leap next May around a pole?"

There'll be no May, there'll be no leap.
Take three steps down to where you'll sleep.

"Umph, no big rush to get to bed.
That third step, why so red, so red?"

For honored guest, red carpets roll,
Inviting to a downward stroll.

"Who carved my name in stone above?
That second date—a 'date' with love?"

A hole you'll come for: hug so numbing
You'll lie there breathless. Till the Second Coming.

"Whose lucky name will roll-call call?
My heart skips like a roulette ball."

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On guest night, gambling's not a sin;
Just say you bet your life you'll win.

"I'm a good egg—I'll close both eyes;
Now mix me up a real surprise."

Une omelette-surprise in a basement *boîte*.
Good mixers fit so tight a spot.

"I smell a rose—what ditch that closes
Calls me to be smelled by roses?"

Today still munching bread on top.
Tomorrow pushing up the crop.

"Night thickens round me like a bowl,
And yet it's day. How almost droll!"

A condominium. Ask where-is-it,
And natives chuckle, 'You can't miss it.'

"Roll-calls—like lizard tongues—unroll.
Fat flies, not me, must be their goal."

Cashier is phoning change of role.
Call's collect, and you're the toll.

""*Charade: two speakers, alternating couplets. The couplets in quotes, indented throughout, are spoken (in pollyanna singsong) by 'you', the honored mortal guest. The couplets without quotes are spoken by the obsequious host of a tourist resort."* —P.V.

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UNCOUPLETS*

"PV's poetry is out of date; he instinctively rhymes"
—A True Friend

All's wrong—I don't want today ending tomorrow;
I want joy following
joy.

O uninhabitable planet,
Hard as
quicksand,

Stop it—earth-mom—stop "tomb"
From gloat-rhyming with lips.

But then, you were always a trap-choice: between duty
And ugly.

Even on the day love and I went tramping together
Through the Scotch highballs,

I remember, I remember
Love's leaf fell in July.

I desire, I desire
To live forever; in the end I flame like ash.

Beaming ogre of our nursery,
Our trust in you has set us slave.

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From graves, green rouge diverts your prey;
We're gift-wrapped in the end for Mother's
Diet.

Now when your sky-queen eyes of blue
Swear to be false,

At least I'll go down without blah or blink: my dove
Coos hate.

*"Uncouplets *is a kind of coitus interruptus to frustrate the ear's expectancy of cliché rhymes, such as 'true' after 'blue', 'sorrow' after 'tomorrow', or even 'granite' after 'planet'. Verlaine once exclaimed 'O qui dira les torts de la Rime!' but never proceeded to do so. Question (I just don't know): has anyone ever before attempted an entire poem of ear-surprises based technically on this frustration of expectancy? The result should be called* three-*line couplets; every couplet has as second line the expected cliché but also the unexpected line reversing it—and reversing the conventional uplift meaning.*

"The aim of the poem, of course, is not these mere formalist gimmicks but an earnest and outraged protest against the sentimental cult of nature and earth-mother."

—P.V.

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Richard Eberhart

LETTER TO ANDREW FOSTER

Where I begin is no beginning;
Except I shall make one tomorrow,
Fire myself out north and west,
Where are lakes, hills, and streams.
Windermere and which shall be
A week, or more. I shall pass a week,
Or more, under my solitary feet.
Probably get rained on. Tomorrow.
Since my two potential, very ial
But not potent, jobs are no more.
Necks wrung and testicles crushed.
Poor, lost, mortal, O so
Once-alive creatures. One lived
In Kent, Conn.; though high-church,
He kept his mouth shut, clamped,
Fed digested brain-biscuits to
Boys, got pockets full of dollars
A 9-month birth-of-leisure year,
And even his laundry washed.
The other was a vague, shadowy person
With less leisure, even than money,
Who moved, cackling and clerking,
In a right London publisher's den;
And thus suffocated to death,
Bewitched fool. Also jugular severed,
And plump man-bulbs shattered beyond
Recognition of incandescence.
So, so. I wilted about Paris,
In vainglorious heat and my own
Inane low glowing fires. Thus
Moped, drooped, collided gently

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On nothingness, ate up misery,
Drank baleful despair, enjoying
Marcel Proust his, -Prevost her
Lucid French-feminine mind.
Pascal commingled, odd triad!
Almost believed in angels in heaven.
But didn't know enough mathematics.

Prester luxuriates in Ritz.
He's earth's best frailty high.
We went, yes, even I, to the
Zoo yesterday. And came away
Befriended by our awareness of
The beam-in-the-eel's-eye and the
Gleam-in-the-newt's-jump one
Stuff. Huge pythons were coiled up,
But slip-knot wise, like great lines
On a ship. Not a stir, except faintly
Discerned blood-breathing. I should have
Liked to put one on a winch:
Make symbol snake-dynamic-actual.
Strindberg did it: and did, I
Suppose, purge, as per Aristotle.

Remember Black. People often interest
By opposites. The less he has,
The more he is; the more differences
One finds, the more there may be there
Praiseworthy. Black, the failure.
He admits and thus not at all.
That canny look, yet such a frail,
Lone fellow, friendship starved.
He had fallen in on himself.
We walked through St. James his park.
He told me his work (at the Tower)
Was among Ancient Monuments.
I cringed. He quizzed me about life.
How same, even, day-day,

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Night-night, for him. He was not
Well dressed. He had no waistcoat.
People looked. He was oblivious.
Like a man continually revolving
Inside his own head, he seemed;
A little queer, almost not quite
All there, conventionally:
Oblivious to things, muttering.
We proposed Soho for dinner;
He never knew on which street to
Walk: thought, turned back;
Knew the name, but not the street;
Seemed afraid of the taxi driver.
We turned in at Mr Brilliance's.
Too late: already the chill descended.
Too late, no getting out, a swagger.
O so swaggler a place. Everybody
Dressed: and we seated next the
Stiffest corpse-stiff English
Un-married dessicated-painted ladies.
Ladies of social London, ha.
Who spoke not a word. And Americans
Flower-pot-bellied all around.
Black Black, no savoir faire.
The head-waiter bull-dozed with caviar.
Near-pound dinner: no caviar.
By strong act of will I made him
Order ham and the et ceteras.
Labrador in London on a
Hot summer night, ho ho, Soho.
And two propped seeming-females all eyes.
Prince Black observes that head-waiter,
A kind of decayed Dempsey, looks
Like a bastard son of Napoleon,
Ordered grand wine out of spite.
Most white Mr. Black, human as loam.
We went to a mellow-drama, very.
By now, by beer, he was susceptible,

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His odd being burned in its own
Dark fires, he spouted epigrams;
Which, if were on shirt-cuff jotted
Were ideas cast into, almost
Mouth-strokes of genius, now, and again.

Take frizzled, frazzled, razzled, prazzled
Tingling, mongling, flangling, clongling
Pops of drops of drops of plops,
Since God's in his purgatorio
And all's flim with Dick Eberhart

A NOTE ON *LETTER TO ANDREW FOSTER*

Letter to Andrew Foster *here sees print forty-five years after it was written. It was discovered in the summer of 1973 by Michael Peich when he began work in the Dartmouth library for his PhD on my letters. I had just come down from Cambridge and returned to America in the summer of 1929 little knowing of the Crash to come in the fall. The poem, unlike the early poems I had been writing, was composed a year before the appearance of my first book.*

My early poems had formal qualities but this seems to have been extruded from my frantic heart as an exuberant jape. I suppose this was why the matter was cast into the loose structure of a verse letter. The recipient was one of the best friends of my senior year at Dartmouth, although he was a year ahead of me, but unknown to each other we both appeared at St. John's College, Cambridge, and saw each other day for two years (1927-1929), Andrew reading History while I took the English Tripos, Parts I and II. Andrew Foster subsequently enjoyed a long career in the Foreign Service and died a few years ago of a heart attack in early retirement here.

My first book having been a long poem, A Bravery of Earth, *it was not until 1936-37 that I allowed a book of my shorter poems and I cannot recall whether this poem was considered for that book and rejected because it was so unlike the rest of my work, or whether I considered this type of jaunty expression inferior to my deepest concerns. It rests its case in giving a then state of mind. And for whatever reasons, it appears to have been forgotten for forty-five years until now brought into view.*

R.E.

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Philip Pearlstein

A Portfolio

PHILIP PEARLSTEIN: A STATEMENT

The drawings of the nude models are almost always done in the company of a small group of artist friends. We have met at one or another studio once a week, for more than twelve years (the group has changed over the years, but some of us have been constant). In looking over my drawings periodically, I select those that promise the most interesting juxtapositions of forms and shapes to base paintings on. When I start the paintings I generally forget the actual drawing and start again directly on the canvas, making radical departures, as I see new possibilities just by moving around the posed models, seeing them from other vantage points. The cropping is never planned. It results from the struggle to find the proper scale of the forms within the rectangle. I start to draw somewhere that gives me the most difficult juxtaposition of forms—usually I start with the hands. I draw the entire hand finger by finger, wrinkle by wrinkle, and then go on to the next form. But the first form drawn provides a module for the rest of the drawing: all successive forms are visually measured against it. I concentrate on drawing the contours of shapes, seeing them for the moment as flat areas. If I get the contours of all the shapes, including the shapes of empty spaces, correctly measured against one another, the drawing works itself out. I don't bother with proportions, anatomical knowledge, or foreshortening. Since my basic premise is that the figures are the main forms of my compositional structures, I see the arms and legs and torsos primarily as directional movements, their contoured areas as the major shapes on my page or canvas, it doesn't matter where they stop. That the cropping seems to echo photographic cropping is accidental. Finding the scale is the essential problem. When painting, my forms tend to grow larger as I work on them, because the brushes I use and the gestures I make take a certain amount of space to develop each wrinkle in. Painting anyway has to do with what goes on between the edges that define each form, rather than with the edges. Putting shading on the drawings of course is more like painting, using the drawn edges as a scaffolding. But like most painters in the history of art I draw the outlines first and put shading on after. In painting one can more easily start with the colored areas and define the edges later. But I expect much more information to be carried by my painted areas when they are finally developed than I do from a drawing no matter how fully developed the drawing is.

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I wish to emphasize that my involvement with the human figure as subject grew out of the technical procedures I describe above. The meaning of the figure in its particular situation had no interest for me. I refuse to be an amateur psychoanalist, or novelist. I would prefer to be thought of as a sort of stilled-action choreographer.

But the subject matter has brought me into conflict with the art-world establishment here in the United States. Because The Establishment here had just finished consolidating the triumph of abstract art, in 1959, and was not about to welcome the work of a realist who presumed to be competitive with abstraction. Now a decade later, and with the company of a number of other aggressively realistic artists, realism seems at least to have gained a beachhead, but my formalism again sets me against the more subject-oriented "Radical Realists" (the motorcycle, truck and horse painters and chrome luncheonette painters).

But in the process I believe I have made a contribution to humanism in 20th century painting—I rescued the human figure from its tormented, agonized condition given it by the expressionistic artists, and the cubist dissectors and distorters of the figure, and at the other extreme I have rescued it from the pornographers, and their easy exploitations of the figure for its sexual implications. I have presented the figure for itself, allowed it its own dignity as a form among other forms in nature. Perhaps it is significant that I developed my attitude during the period of political upheaval in the United States in the 1960s, when the terms "seeing it as it is," and "saying it like it is," became radical expressions.

Wash Drawing, "Female Model Sitting on Bed with Indian Blanket"

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Oil on Canvas, "Girl Sitting on Cast Iron Bed"

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Wash Drawing, "Female Model Standing by an Easel"

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Oil on Canvas, "Female Model Standing by an Easel"

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Wash Drawing, ' Female Model on Bentwood Loveseat''

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Oil on Canvas, "Female Model Reclining on Bentwood Loveseat"

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Wash Drawing, "Two Female Models on Hammock and Floor"

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Oil on Canvas, "Two Female Models on Hammock and Seated on Floor"

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Natalie Barney in her early 20's

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A Natalie Barney Garland

Liliane de Pougy and Natalie Barney

Edited by George Wickes

I

Natalie Clifford Barney, who was born in Dayton, Ohio, in 1876 and who died in Paris in 1972 at the age of 95, was a legendary figure in France but almost unknown in her native land. She is the *Amazone* to whom Remy de Gourmont addressed his *Lettres à l'Amazone*, she appears as a character in half a dozen works of fiction, and her name turns up in scores of memoirs. For over sixty years her house in Paris provided the setting for an international salon frequented by many of the leading writers, artists, diplomats and intellectuals of the century, including Gertrude Stein, Sacha Guitry, Paul Valéry, Baron de Rothschild, Harold Acton, Janet Flanner, Bernard Berenson, Romaine Brooks, Colette, Gide, Cocteau, Eugène Jolas and Ezra Pound. She herself was a writer, but her notoriety stems even more from her being unquestionably the leading lesbian of her time.

I had first heard about Natalie Barney when I was writing a book about the Americans in Paris. At that time the magazine *Adam* devoted an issue to Natalie Barney containing selections

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from her work and commentaries by members of her circle. But what impressed me more was the remark made by Janet Flanner in declining to contribute to *Adam*: "Miss Barney is a perfect example of an enchanting person not to write about." I am still puzzling over that remark, wondering if I may have taken it in the wrong sense. At the time I took it as a warning that this enchanting person wanted to be left in peace. As it turned out, Natalie Barney did not take this view at all. Eight years later, when I finally met her, she kept exclaiming, "Oh, why didn't you come before?" and "Why have you waited so long to come?"

There she was, this extraordinary survival from another era, this fabled creature, once a legendary beauty who defied convention, now ancient and shrunken, wrapped in a pale blue dressing gown to match her pale blue eyes and very fine white hair. She looked like a carefully wrapped doll in that expensive hotel drawing room (she had been living in the Hôtel Meurice as an invalid for the past two years, though her faithful housekeeper Berthe still lived at her old home at 20 rue Jacob) with its vases of tall expensive flowers—not at all the setting in which she had lived her life—but there was still a spark of animation behind the vague look in her eyes.

She was not very good at answering questions but quite lucid in asking them and particularly acute in questioning me about my private life. When she learned that I was married and had children she exclaimed, "Why, then your career is finished!"

She didn't say much about the crucial period in her life, about what made her decide to live in Paris and to live the way she did. But she did say several times, "It was very dangerous then." Of her intimates she mentioned only Romaine Brooks who had died in Nice the previous December. Romaine was her oldest friend, and she felt her death most keenly.

She repeated several little anecdotes or remarks about Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound and George Antheil. Disconcertingly she kept asking me if I knew them, if I'd been in Paris then, what had happened to them and others, most of them

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dead. Her mind wandered, repeating itself like a broken record.

She said she went for walks around the *quartier* every night with Gertrude Stein and her dog. This must have been after 1937, when Gertrude Stein moved to the rue Christine, quite close to the rue Jacob. They used to talk about family quarrels, and Gertrude always said, Never mind, families always quarreled, that was what consanguinity was all about. Evidently Alice Toklas didn't accompany them on these walks, for her memories of Miss Toklas were vague ("What's her name? What's become of her?"), while she clearly remembered walking the dog and spoke of Gertrude as a good friend. When the dog died, it didn't seem to bother Gertrude. She simply got a new one and gave it the same name.

Ezra Pound she remembered in the company of Olga Rudge—his protegée, she explained, a violinist. She remembered playing tennis with Pound, so this must have been in the early twenties when he lived in Paris. Pound brought other poets to call. She kept trying to recall a remark, with three adjectives in crescendo, something like: "Ezra Pound was arrogant, outrageous and unspeakable." But she couldn't get the adjectives straight. I gathered that her intention was not to criticize Pound, whom she liked, but to fix him in a phrase.

George Antheil she remembered as a tiny little man, like a monkey, with a tiny little wife; she wondered if they had ever had any children. She also remembered Virgil Thomson and the man who lived with him, though she couldn't remember his name. Thornton Wilder continued to come and call on her. Julien Green she did not like, finding him too strait-laced and puritanical.

Most of the time she preferred to speak English, but she kept testing my French. I had the impression that she expressed herself most deftly in French, though she was totally bilingual. Her English had a nineteenth century flavor about it, reminding me of the way my grandmother spoke.

After two and a half hours Natalie Barney was still going strong, and I had to excuse myself, for I was overdue for a

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dinner invitation, never having expected the interview to last more than a half hour. That was the last I saw of Natalie Barney, for I left Paris two days later, and the following winter she died.

II

In the 1920's Natalie Barney became as famous for her avowal of lesbianism as she was for her literary salon. Her Pensées de L'Amazone *(1920) presented the conclusions that she had reached about Sapphic love during her stormier years. This book must have done a great deal to establish her position, which one of her friends summarized in the phrase "*l'impératrice des lesbiennes.*" Something of this reputation is suggested by Sylvia Beach in her book of memoirs,* Shakespeare and Company.[1]

One of the people who always took a great interest in my bookshop and also Adrienne's was my compatriot Miss Natalie Clifford Barney, the *Amazone* of Remy de Gourmont's *Letters*. She rode horseback in the Bois de Boulogne every morning, hence the name. She wrote poetry, and her *salon* was famous in the Paris literary world, but I wonder if she ever took literary things very seriously. As an amazon, Miss Barney was not belligerent. On the contrary, she was charming, and all dressed in white with her blond colouring, most attractive. Many of her sex found her fatally so, I believe.

Renée Vivien was Natalie Barney's first great love, and her early death is sometimes said to have been caused by Natalie Barney. The following is Colette's extraordinary and rather full account of Renée Vivien in her declining days. It is from Le Pur et l'impur[2] *The unnamed "master" mentioned here is commonly assumed to be a Baroness van Zuylen, née Rothschild. Colette's explanation seems particularly reliable, not only because she was a neighbor and eyewitness but also because she studied Renée Vivien's behavior with concern. Her portrait is remarkable for being at once sympathetic and unsentimental.*

[1] *published by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc.*

[2] *from* The Pure and the Impure *by Colette, translated by Herma Briffault* © *1966, 1967 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc.*

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If I were to publish the correspondence of this poet who never ceased claiming kinship with Lesbos, it would astound only because of its childishness. I stress this very particular childish quality, which strikes a false note—dare I say a note of obvious insincerity? The charming face of Renée Vivien reflected only a part of that childlike quality, in the rounded cheek, soft and downy, in the innocent short upper lip, so typically English, curled up and revealing four little front teeth. A bright smile constantly lit up her eyes, a chestnut-brown which became greenish in sunlight. She wore her long, beautiful ash-blond hair, which was fine and straight, massed at the top of her head, from which many locks came down now and then like wisps of fine straw.

There is not a single feature of her youthful face that I do not vividly recall. Everything in it bespoke childishness, roguishness, and the propensity to laughter. Impossible to find anywhere in that face, from the fair hair to the sweet dimple of the weak little chin, any line that was not a line of laughter, any sign of the hidden tragic melancholy that throbs in the poetry of Renée Vivien. I never saw Renée sad. She would exclaim, in her lisping English accent, "Oh, my dear little Colette, how disgusting this life is!" Then she would burst into laughter. In all too many of her notes, I find that same exclamation repeated, often spelled out frankly in the coarsest words: "Isn't this life sheer muck? Well, I hope it will soon be over!" This impatience of hers amused her friends, but her hope was not dashed, for she died in her thirtieth year.

Our friendship was in no way literary, it goes without saying—or rather, I should say, thanks to my respect for literature. I am sparing of words on that subject, except for occasional exclamations of admiration, and in Renée Vivien I found the same diffidence and well bred restraint. She, too, refused to "talk shop." Whenever she gave me any of her books, she always hid them under a bouquet of violets or a basket of fruit or a length of Oriental silk. She was secretive with me on the two literary aspects of her brief existence: the cause of her sadness, and her method of work. Where did she

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work? And at what hours? The vast, dark, sumptuous, and ever changing flat in the avenue du Bois gave no hint of work. That ground-floor flat in the avenue du Bois has never been well described, by the way. Except for some gigantic Buddhas, all the furnishings moved mysteriously: after provoking surprise and admiration for a time, they had a way of disappearing. . .

Among the unstable marvels, Renée wandered, not so much clad as veiled in black or purple, almost invisible in the scented darkness of the immense rooms barricaded with leaded windows, the air heavy with curtains and incense. Three or four times I caught her curled up in a corner of a divan, scribbling with a pencil on a writing pad propped on her knees. On these occasions she always sprang up guiltily, excusing herself, murmuring, "It's nothing, I've finished now. . ." Her lithe body devoid of density languidly drooped, as if beneath the weight of her poppy-flower head with its pale golden hair, surmounted by immense and unsteady hats. She held her long and slender hands in front of her, gropingly. The dresses she wore were always long, covering her feet, and she was afflicted with an angelic clumsiness, was always losing as she went her gloves, handkerchief, sunshade, scarf. . .

She was constantly giving things away: the bracelets on her arms opened up, the necklace slipped from her martyr's throat. She was as if deciduous. It was as if her languorous body rejected anything that would give it a third dimension.

The first time I dined at her place, three brown tapers dripped waxen tears in tall candlesticks and did not dispel the gloom. A low table, from the Orient, offered a pell-mell assortment of *hors d'oeuvres*—strips of raw fish rolled upon glass wands, *foie gras*, shrimps, salad seasoned with sugar and pepper—and there was a well-chosen Piper-Heidsieck champagne *brut*, and very strong cocktails—Renée Vivien was ahead of her time. Suffocated with the obscurity, mistrustful of the unfamiliar fire of Russian, Greek, and Chinese alcohols, I scarcely touched the food. I remember that Renée's gay

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laughter, her liveliness, the faint halo of light trembling in her golden hair all combined to sadden me, as does the happiness of blind children who laugh and play without the help of light. I did not believe that this meeting in this luxurious flat submerged in darkness could result in any real friendship with this tall young woman who tossed off her drink with the obliviousness one sees in bridesmaids at a country wedding.

Among the beverages that she raised to her lips was a cloudy elixir in which floated a cherry harpooned on a toothpick. I laid a hand on her arm and cautioned her.

"Don't drink it."

She opened her eyes so wide that the lashes of her upper eyelids touched her eyebrows.

"Why not?"

"I've tasted it," I said, embarrassed. "It's . . . it's deadly. Be careful, it tastes like some kind of vitriol."

I dared not tell her that I suspected a practical joke. She laughed, flashing her white teeth.

"But these are my own cocktails, *ma pethith Coletthe*. They are excellent."

She emptied the glass at one gulp, neither gasping nor blinking, and her rounded cheek kept its floral pallor.

I did not notice that evening her almost total abstention from food, but later on I discovered that she subsisted mainly on a few spoonfuls of rice, some fruit or other, and alcohol—especially alcohol. During this first evening, nothing could dispel the uneasiness engendered by the strangeness of the place, bound to astonish a guest, the semi-darkness, the exotic foods on plates of jade, vermeil, or Chinese porcelain, foods that had come from countries too far away.

However, I was to see Renée Vivien many times afterward.

We discovered that her house and mine communicated, thanks to the two garden courts separated only by a grille, and that the concierge who had the keys was not incorruptible; I could therefore go from the rue de Villejust to the avenue du Bois to visit her without setting foot in the street. Occasionally I used this facility. On my way, I would rap on the windows of

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the garden flat where Robert d'Humières lived, and he would open his window and hold out an immaculate treasure, an armful of snow, that is to say, his blue-eyed white cat, Lanka, saying, "To you I entrust my most precious possession."

Twenty meters farther on, and I would confront, at Renée's, the air which, like stagnant water, slowed down my steps, the odor of incense, of flowers, of overripe apples. It is an understatement to say that I was stifled in that gloom. I became almost wickedly intolerant there, yet never wore out the patience of the gossamer angel who dedicated offerings of lady apples to the Buddhas. One day, when the spring wind was stripping the leaves from the Judas trees in the avenue, I was nauseated by the funereal perfumes and tried to open the window: it was nailed shut. What a contribution such a detail is, what a flourish it adds to a theme already rich! What a quantity of lurid gleams and glints of gold in the semi-darkness, of whispering voices behind the doors, of Chinese masks, of ancient instruments hanging on the walls, mute, only vaguely whimpering at the banging of a door beneath my heavy hand. At Renée Vivien's I could have wished to be younger, so I could be a little fearful. But impatience got the better of me and one evening I brought an offending, an inadmissible big oil lamp, and plumped it down, lit, in front of my plate. Renée wept big tears over this, like a child—it is only right to add that she consoled herself in like manner.

Try as she would to please me by inviting along with me two or three of my best friends, to make me happy, our intimacy did not seem to make any real progress. At the table in the darkness, or lounging comfortably and provided with exotic food and drink, Turkish cigarettes or Chinese blond tobacco in miniature silver pipes, we remained a bit stiff and uneasy, as if our young hostess and we ourselves apprehended the unexpected return of an absent and unknown "master."

This "master" was never referred to by the name of woman. We seemed to be waiting for some catastrophe to project her into our midst, but she merely kept sending invisible messengers laden with jades, enamels, lacquers, fabrics . . . A

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collection of ancient Persian gold coins came, glittered, disappeared, leaving in its place glass cabinets of exotic butterflies and other insects, which in their turn gave way to a colossal Buddha, a miniature garden of bushes having leaves of crystal and fruit of precious stones. From one marvel to another Renée moved, uncertainly, already detached, and showing the indifferent self-effacement of a guard in a museum.

When I recall the changes which gradually rendered Renée more understandable, I believe I can link these with certain gestures at first, then with some words that threw a different light on her. Some people become transformed by riches, others acquire a real life only by impoverishment, their very destitution giving them life. When was I able to forget that Renée Vivien was a poet, I mean, when did I begin to feel a real interest in her? No doubt it was one evening when dining at her place, an evening of spicy foods and of disquieting drinks—I risked drinking only two glasses of a perfect and very dry champagne—a gay evening and yet inexplicably strained, when Renée's gaiety expressed itself in laughter, in an eagerness to applaud exaggeratedly any least droll word.

Exceptionally that evening she wore a white dress that bared her delicate and youthful throat and the nape of her neck, where wisps of her soft straight hair were always coming undone. Between two remarks and without warning, she suddenly leaned against the back of her chair, her head bowed, her chin on her thin chest, her eyes closed . . . I can still see her two slender hands resting open and lifeless on the tablecloth.

This fainting spell, or whatever it was, lasted less than ten seconds, and Renée came to without embarrassment.

"Forgive me, my dears, I must have gone to sleep," she murmured, and resumed the argument she had left for the fleeting death from which she had returned fired with a strange frenzy.

"Oh, that B.!" she exclaimed, "I don't want to hear any more about him or his verses tonight. He has *no* talent. He is—wait, I know what he is, he's a cunt, a cunt with a pen. Yes, a cunt with a pen!"

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The word fell into our silence, coarse, blunt. Anyone of us would have been capable of pronouncing that word in an undertone and among ourselves, but as Renée repeated the indecent remark, there reigned on her childlike features a blank expression that set the words outside time, deprived of any significance, and revealed in the speaker a profound disorder.

The wily lunatic is lost if through the narrowest crack he allows a sane eye to peer into his locked universe and thus profane it. Afterward, it is the sane eye that changes, is affected, becomes fascinated with the mystery it has seen and can never cease to question. The more sensitive the lunatic, the less able is he to resist this prying interest of the normal human being. I felt that Renée's change of key—to myself, I compared Renée to a sweet melody, a little flat despite its laborious harmonies—was approaching.

This was her very pathetic secret, the confession of a quite ordinary neurosis. Or was it? Yes, if one can be satisfied with a single fact, as I was for a time—a rather short time. Renée was dying when I was told how she had managed in a weirdly simple way to drink to excess without anyone in Paris or anyone in Nice in the little house in the Parc Cessole ever being able to catch her at it. . .

Adjoining the bathroom, in a small room that substituted as a linen closet, her docile chambermaid sat sewing. Quick, maladroit, stumbling against the furniture, Renée was constantly calling out for help to . . . let us call her Justine, for that was absolutely not her name.

"Justine, my dear, will you sew on this hook that's come off?" "Justine, dear, have you ironed my embroidered frock?" "Quick, my slipper ribbon is undone. . ." "Oh! These new gloves still have a price tag on, do take it off, Justine, will you?" "Please, Justine, tell the cook that tonight. . ."

Behind the sewing-room door, which remained open, you heard only a murmured reply: "Yes, mademoiselle. Very well, mademoiselle. . . ." And the maid did not leave the

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Renée Vivien by Alice Pike Barney

Natalie Barney with Renée Vivien

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chair where she sat at work. Every time Renée appeared, Justine had only to lean over to reach, under her chair, one of the filled wineglasses that her skirt concealed. She held it out in silence to Renée, who emptied it at a gulp and went from the linen closet to the bathroom, where she found waiting her, punctually renewed, a glass of milky-looking water clouded with perfumes. She would gargle this and hurriedly spit it out. People who had seen and smelled that glass of perfumed liquid believed and have affirmed that Renée Vivien drank toilet water. What she so foolishly imbibed was no better.

I sometimes met Renée in the mornings, when I led my memorable cat Prrou out on a leash for a walk along the grassy paths in the avenue du Bois, and I recall one such encounter. As usual when she ventured out into the streets, Renée was a bit overdressed. In getting into the carriage that morning, she stepped on the hem of her long skirt and caught the strap of her bag on the handle of the door.

"Where are you going this early in the day?" I asked.

"To buy my Buddha. I've decided to buy one every day. Don't you think that's a good idea?"

"Excellent. Enjoy yourself!"

She turned to wave goodbye and knocked her hat askew. To hold it on, she raised the hand she had passed through the strap of the bag and it, ill shut, fell open, scattering a quantity of crumpled bank notes. "Oh, *mon Dieu*," she exclaimed, laughing softly. At last the fiacre, the big hat, the dress with the ripped hem went off in the distance, while, close to my cat hygienically scratching the grass, I stood, reflecting: "The alcohol . . . the thinness . . . the poetry, the daily Buddha. . . . And that's not all. What is the dark origin of all this nonsense?"

May I be excused for having included as an element of "all this nonsense" the word "poetry." Renée Vivien has left a great many poems of unequal strength, force, merit, unequal as the human breath, as the pulsations of human suffering. The cult of which they sing arouses curiosity and then infatuation; today they have disarmed the indignation of even

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the lowest kind of moralists—and this is a fate I would not have dared to promise them if they had lauded only the love of Chloë for Daphnis, since the lowest kind of moralist follows the fashions and makes a display of broadmindedness. In addition, Renée's work inhabits a region of elevated melancholy, in which the *amies*, the female couple, daydream and weep as often as they embrace. Admirably acquainted with our language, broken to the strict rules of French meter, Renée Vivien betrays her foreignness—that is to say, her assimilation of French masterworks relatively late in life—by exuding her Baudelairism in the years 1900-9, which was rather late for us.

When I found out she was so fallible, so faddy, so enslaved to a ruinous habit that she hoped to keep secret, my instinctive attraction to Renée changed into friendship. Friendship is not always circumspect, and one day I went so far as to put a strange question:

"Tell me, Renée. Are you happy?"

Renée blushed, smiled, then abruptly stiffened.

"Why, of course, my dear Colette. Why would you want me to be unhappy?"

"I didn't say I wanted it," I retorted.

And I went off, dissatisfied with us both. But next day her embarrassed laugh was apologetic and she thrashed the air around me with her long arms, maladroit and affectionate, as if she were looking for a way into my confidence. I noticed her listlessness, the dark rings under her eyes, and I asked her if she was ill.

"Why, not at all," she protested emphatically.

She then yawned behind her hand and explained the reasons for her lassitude in terms so clear that I could not believe my ears. And she did not stop there. . . What new warmth had melted her reserve and encouraged such expansiveness? Unhindered by any ambiguity, she spoke openly, and what she spoke of was not love but sexual satisfaction, and this, of course, referred to the only sexual satisfaction she knew, the pleasure she took with a woman. Then it was a question of the satisfactions of another epoch,

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another woman, and regrets and comparisons. Her way of talking about physical love was rather like that of little girls brought up for a life of debauchery: both innocent and crude. The most curious thing about her calm and farfetched confessions, during the recital of which Renée never left off the tone of tranquil gossip, strangely in accord with the least ambiguous terms, was that they revealed an immodest consideration for "the senses" and the technique of obtaining physical satisfaction. . . And when, beyond the poet who praised the pallor of her Lesbian loves, their sobbing in the desolate dawns, I caught a glimpse of "Madame How-many-times," counting on her fingers, mentioning by name things and gestures, I put an end to the indiscretion of those young half-conscious lips, and not very tactfully. I believe I told Renée that certain frank remarks she had made were as suitable to her as a silk hat to a monkey. . . As a sequel to this incident, I still have the brief note she sent me, very imposing in its form:

> You gravely offended me last night, Colette, and I am not one who forgives. Adieu. Renée

However, the other Renée, the good and charming Renée, saw to it that I had a second note two hours after the first one. It read:

> Forgive me, dear little Colette. God only knows what I wrote to you. Eat these lovely peaches as a toast to my health and come to see me. Come dine with me as soon as you can, and bring along our friends.

I did not fail to do so, although I took exception to the odd, clandestine character of those feasts laid out among three candles, to which sometimes Renée invited a harpist, at other times a soloist. But on the threshold of her apartment, which I always said smelled like "a rich man's funeral," we met Renée in a black evening dress, ready to go out.

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"No, my dears," she murmured agitatedly, "you've not made a mistake, I was expecting you tonight. Sit down at the table, I'll be back very soon, I swear it by Aphrodite! There are shrimps, *foie gras*, some Chios wine, and fruit from the Balearic Isles. . . ."

In her haste, she stumbled on the steps. She turned her golden head toward me, the luminous heart of a great beehive of dark velvet, then came back to whisper in my ear:

"Hush, I'm requisitioned. *She* is terrible at present."

Constrained, mystified, we remained and we waited. . . . And Renée did not return.

Another time she was gaily having dinner, I mean to say, she was watching us dine, and at the dessert she stood up, gathered together with a shaky hand her long gloves, a fan, a little silk purse, then excused herself:

"My dears, I have to go. . . *Voila*. . ."

She did not finish what she had to say but burst into tears and fled. A carriage waiting for her outside bore her away.

In spite of my old friend Hamel (called Hamond, in the *Vagabonde*), who had a paternal affection for Renée and who now interceded for her, I went home with dignity, swearing never to return. But I did return, because the friendship one has given to a human being who is already going to pieces, is already headed toward her downfall, does not obey the dictates of pride. When I went back, urged by Renée in a laconic note, I found her sitting on the rim of the tub in the cold, ugly, and rudimentary bathroom. Seeing her pallor, the trembling of her long hands, her absurd thinness encased in a black dress, I tried to cheer her by addressing her as the Muse of Lévy-Dhurmer. She paid no attention.

"I'm going away," she said.

"Yes? Where are you going?"

"I don't know. But I'm in danger. *She* will kill me. Or else *she* will take me to the other side of the world, to countries where I shall be at her mercy. . . She will kill me."

"Poison? Revolver?"

"No."

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In four words she explained how she might perish. Four words of a frankness to make you blink. This would not be worth telling, except for what Renée said then.

"With her I dare not pretend or lie, because at that moment she lays her ear over my heart."

I prefer to believe that this detail and the "danger," which both, alike, seem to have been borrowed from P. J. Toulet's *Monsieur du Paur*, were conceived under the influence of alcohol. Perhaps, even, the exhausting Lesbian lover never existed. Perhaps, invisible, she owed her strength, her quasi-tangibility to the last effort, the last miracle of an imagination which, getting out of hand, brought forth ghouls instead of nymphs?

While I was on tour—the Baret Music Hall Tour—I was unaware that Renée was very close to death. She kept losing weight, always refusing to eat. In her spells of giddiness, in the aurora borealis of starvation, she thought she saw the flames of the Catholic hell. Someone close to her perhaps fanned the flames, or described them to her? Mystery. Enfeebled, she became humble and was converted. Her paganism was so little rooted in her. Fever and coughing shook her hollow chest. I was by chance spared the sight of Renée dying, then dead. She carried off with her more than one secret, and beneath her purple veil, Renée Vivien, the poet, led away—her throat encircled with moonstones, beryls, aquamarines, and other anemic gems—the immodest child, the excited little girl who taught me, with unembarrassed competence: "There are fewer ways of making love than they say, and more than one believes. . ."

Blond, her cheek dimpled, with a tender, laughing mouth and great, soft eyes, she was, even so, drawn down beneath the earth, toward everything that is of no concern to the living. Like all those who never use their strength to the limit, I am hostile to those who let life burn them out. Voluntary consumption is, I always feel, a kind of alibi. I fear there is not much difference between the habit of obtaining sexual satisfaction and, for instance, the cigarette habit. Smokers,

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male and female, inject and excuse idleness in their lives every time they light a cigarette.

The habit of obtaining sexual satisfaction is less tyrannical than the tobacco habit, but it gains on one. O voluptuous pleasure, O lascivious ram, cracking your skull against all obstacles, time and again! Perhaps the only misplaced curiosity is that which persists in trying to find out here, on this side of death, what lies beyond the grave. . . Voluptuaries, consumed by their senses, always begin by flinging themselves with a great display of frenzy into an abyss. But they survive, they come to the surface again. And they develop a routine of the abyss: "It's four o'clock. . . At five I have my abyss. . ." It is possible that this young woman poet, who rejected the laws of ordinary love, led a sensible enough life until her personal abyss of half past eight in the evening. An abyss she imagined? Ghouls are rare.

III

Another of Natalie Barney's great loves was Romaine Brooks, an American-born painter who lived most of her life in France. Until her death at the age of 96, the two remained the closest of friends. They first met in 1915. It is surprising that they did not meet sooner, for both had been in Paris off and on for twenty years, and Romaine Brooks also knew Renée Vivien. But Romaine Brooks was a serious painter who hated to waste her time in social frivolity; the morbid affectations of Renée Vivien may have put her off meeting Natalie Barney. In her unpublished memoirs ("No Pleasant Memories") she devotes chapters to both Renée Vivien and Natalie Barney.*

RENÉE VIVIEN

It was unfortunate that Renée Vivien crossed my path at that very moment, and when her own life was at its lowest ebb.

She had long since broken away from all social ties, but of her exile she had made a lieu more desolate than can be imagined. I was taken by a friend to her flat, a rez-de-chaussée on the Avenue du Bois.

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There comes before me the dark heavily curtained room, overreaching itself in lugubrious effects: grim life-sized Oriental figures sitting propped up on chairs, phosphorescent Buddhas glowing dimly in the folds of black draperies. The air is heavy with perfumed incense. A curtain draws aside and Renée Vivien stands before us attired in Louis XVI male costume. Her straight blond hair falls to her shoulders, her flower-like face is bent down; she does not lift it even to greet us. Though I know that she is a very gifted poetess it is difficult to detect other than a seemingly affected and childish personality. Besides it is the clap-trap of her surroundings that holds perforce the attention. We lunch seated on the floor Oriental fashion and scant food is served on ancient Damascus ware, cracked and stained. During the meal Renée Vivien leaves us to bring in from the garden her pet frogs and a serpent which she twines round her wrist.

Everything in her flat shows a like desire to surprise: a tunnel-shaped Japanese bed lighted from within; carved doors with Oriental lattice windows defying privacy. What possible affinity is there between those ugly surroundings and the poetical images of our pale hostess? It is clear that the world of things does not hold for her its further significance.

Though this first visit was followed by many others, her melancholy child-like self amid such a show of affectation never ceased to embarrass me and to keep me silent. I dare say she thought me naturally so, but it seemed to make no difference in her liking for me, and being completely astray, I soon found myself drifting along with her.

As these recollections insist on importuning me now, she herself becomes more and more indistinct; her face undefined is bent over . . . even so it was then and I to wonder why. Later I know that she had never freed herself from an early sorrow . . . and she sought relief.

If ghosts were wont to visit and haunt me, she, pale life, visited and haunted death. She expresses this in her epitaph:

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Natalie Barney in the Forêt de Fontainebleau

Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks in Geneva, not long after they met, circa 1915

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Voici la porte d'ou je sors . . .
O mes roses et mes épines!
Qu'importe l'autrefois? Je dore
En songeant aux choses divines . . .

Voici donc mon âme ravie,
Car elle s'apaise et s'endort
Ayant, pour l'amour de la Mort,
Pardonné ce crime: la Vie.

When she intimated that an old friend of hers was jealous of me, I willingly believed her and made it the pretext to end our friendship. But she had taken this indirect way hoping to attach me still further. Some one came to intercede for her. She was now alone and would I not go back? I could not go back—a few months afterward I heard that Renée Vivien was dead.

Her short life had been but an effort to reach this goal. She had waved to me from afar, not that she wanted help, but that she hoped that I might turn and join her.

NATALIE BARNEY

Renée Vivien had often spoken to me of Natalie Barney and I found little interest in listening to those endless love grievances which are so often devoid of any logical justification.

Before I knew Natalie I often caught glimpses of her from my car solemnly walking in the Bois de Boulogne followed by a pretty but insignificant little woman dressed in Oriental clothes with a shawl on her head. This left me wondering till I knew and understood Natalie. She possessed, along with many other literary people, the capacity of endowing the commonplace with her own poetical fancies. She told me that when this little woman danced (and very second-rate dancing it was) it brought to her all the splendors of the East. It was the same at another time with a Chinese girl. This young person who looked Chinese except for a long nose, had been educated in

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Belgium and during the process lost all the natural reticence and dignity of her race to become like some over-free and crude Westerner. But Natalie would thrust a sword into her hands and tell her to jump about in Chinese fashion and that sufficed to create an illusion.

Natalie herself was a miracle. Though she had lived many years in dank unhealthy houses, among many dank unhealthy people, she remained uncontaminated, as fresh as a Spring morning. The finer qualities of her intellect had allowed her to rise above rather than remain within her chosen "milieu." Her "spirit" was used neither as a weapon of defense nor of attack, but rather as a game wherein she found few opponents worthy of her subtle repartee. She never ruffled anyone. To be "spirituelle" without malice, to keep well within two ruled lines is an achievement. Her rebellion against conventions was not combative as was mine. She simply wanted to follow her own inclinations—these not always bringing credit to her. In those days Bohemia was the only refuge for the independent, and when I first knew Natalie she was certainly one of its members. But later, after the war, when points of view had broadened, she actually became popular and this was a sore disappointment to me. It was not long before I was again meeting at her house the very hornets I had hoped to escape for ever. But I had never found a real woman friend before and Natalie brought me a wealth of friendship which I gratefully accepted and fully returned. After all, I reflected, the point is not whether she is popular, but that I remain firm in my contempt of popularity. So when in spite of myself I was dragged into her "milieu," I soon became like one of those caterpillars we read about which when captured is paralyzed in such fashion as to allow its enemies to devour it alive and at leisure. In such wise friendship she held me prisoner. I could say little about this peculiar situation to Natalie for she soared above any such petty vindictiveness and besides she was apt to ignore what did not touch her directly. It took some twenty years before she realized that I had not been all along mildly afflicted with some form of persecution mania.

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IV

Née Bettina Jones, Madame Gaston Bergery was one of several gifted and attractive American sisters who went to Paris in the early 30s and worked for Schiaparelli and other fashion designers. She was 19 when she first met Natalie Barney and remained a constant friend and frequent caller until the end of her life. Madame Bergery is a keen observer with a remarkable memory, a great fund of anecdote and a rapid flow of wit. Her contribution to the volume of reminiscences collected by Natalie Barney, In Memory of Dorothy Ierne Wilde, *is by far the most vivid and verbatim.*

Madame Bergery spoke glowingly of Natalie as a wonderful presence, always gracious and amusing, with extraordinary sparkle and gaiety. Though she looked like Mother Superior presiding with great dignity, she laughed like a schoolgirl. Because of her bearing she appeared tall, but actually she wasn't. Madame Bergery described her eyes as very sparkling with stars in them, like dwarf dahlias with little round petals. This was a rare phenomenon that occurred in pale blue eyes. Oscar Wilde had it and Marshal Pétain and Natalie Barney. Madame Bergery knew of no one else.

By the 1930s Natalie was no longer slender and she looked rather like Benjamin Franklin. She and Romaine looked like Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Madame Bergery remembered seeing them once with Ida Rubinstein, who looked like a scarecrow from the Ballet Russe, the three of them congratulating themselves on having succeeded in their chosen careers. She also remembered Natalie wearing a Wizard of Oz dress that was made for her by Madame Vionnet, with astrological symbols all over it.

Natalie and the Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre were not grotesque like Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, or Colette, who was a peasant woman with rude manners and hands and feet like bunches of carrots. Natalie was very feminine. She didn't like mannish women; she found them ridiculous or repugnant. She herself was always very well dressed in white tea gowns, sometimes embroidered, that she got from Madame Vionnet, and she patronized other fashionable dress-

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Natalie Barney, circa 1939

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makers. Madame Bergery did not consider Natalie's style at all dated; and Natalie didn't wear costumes like the Duncans. In fact, Madame Bergery once visited the Duncan Academy with Natalie, who was dressed in a grey suit with a grey toque like any correct American society lady.

There were never crowds of people at the salon, even before the war. After all there wasn't room for great numbers, since everyone sat down and everyone ate. Of course people came and went, some for only an hour, leaving the intimate members of the circle to stay longer. Sometimes in warm weather the doors to the garden were open, and a table was set up there. Sometimes there were three musicians playing discreetly out of sight behind a screen. Once Dolly Wilde remarked, "Oh Natalie, you forgot to put the hermaphrodites in the bushes." Were they real hermaphrodites? Of course Dolly had a very Firbankish sense of humor.

In the 30s there were lots of English visitors, who came whenever they happened to be in Paris: Dolly Wilde, Daisy Fellowes, Victor and Nancy Cunard. When Nancy brought her Negro friend Henry, he and Natalie understood each other perfectly. Henry's mother was a respectable Negro laundress back in Washington. So Natalie understood him better than Nancy, who was always taking on causes.

Sometimes there were recitals upstairs in Natalie's room, with overly operatic voices accompanied by a crystal harp. But mostly Natalie was literary. There were little cucumber sandwiches like those served by Oscar Wilde and no doubt other literary delicacies besides. Many of Natalie's deeds and gestures were self-consciously literary. "Natalie gave you a feast of reason, a seasoning of wit and a flow of words."

She didn't read much when Madame Bergery knew her—she preferred to have people read to her—though she must have read a great deal at one time. She used to display on her table books from people she knew, and she would pick up little scraps from them.

People who were in a position to know said she spoke the most perfect eighteenth century French—better than any French person.

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Natalie liked good food, but she didn't drink much wine. As a rule she preferred sweet wines. She did not smoke opium, although it was fashionable in the 30s—like lesbianism.

Madame Bergery speculated about the motive behind Natalie's conquests. She didn't consider Natalie passionate and was inclined to agree that it was the desire to dominate. Among her great loves she mentioned Eve Palmer.

She showed me two line drawings done by Ariel de la Pérouse, one a self-portrait, the other of Natalie Barney, both bare-breasted but stylized. Ariel was a person who experimented. In 1922, when she met Natalie, she experimented at being arty and lesbian. Later she experimented with literature and with marriage, then with having affairs with the surrealists and other famous people, and now with travel. Ariel de la Pérouse is supposed to be the principal character in Natalie's novel, *The One Who Is Legion, or A.D.'s After-Life*.

Natalie didn't like funerals, but she was one of four people to attend Robert de Montesquieu's after he had been ostracized by society. She was a "materialist," Madame Bergery said a number of times, and usually saw no reason to make a fuss when someone was dead.

V

Elizabeth Eyre was 18 when she and her husband Pierre de Lanux—one of the four young men of letters who founded La Nouvelle Revue Francaise—*moved into an apartment in the main building at 20 rue Jacob overlooking the courtyard that led to Natalie Barney's* pavillon. *They did not know who Natalie Barney was when they first watched with fascination the comings and goings of a striking group of people, distinguished elderly gentlemen with canes, equally distinguished younger gentlemen and elegantly dressed women. Then one day they met Natalie Barney at a reception given by Adrienne Monnier. Eyre de Lanux was too timid to address her, but Natalie Barney recognized her as a neighbor and invited her to come to the next Friday gathering. Mme. de Lanux soon found herself attending the salon regularly. She continued to go all*

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through the 20s and into the 30s. Her impressions provide a glimpse of the salon in its heyday.

The hazardous Fridays as Paul Valéry called them. Why do I always remember them as though there'd been a light rain? Natalie's house looked like an aquarium, with underwater light. There was never any sunlight in the salon because the light was filtered through the big trees in the garden. There were chairs all around the salon, as in a schoolroom, with people sitting all around the walls. I remember the triangular sandwiches and the harlequin colored little cakes from Rumplemayers. The punch came later, in the 30s.

The first person Natalie introduced me to was Professor Seignobos, who was very old and looked like a toad. I met him every single Friday I went there. We never had anything to say to each other.

The second person was Doctor Mardrus, the great Orientalist, the translator of *A Thousand and One Nights*. He was a very charming, very learned man. When Natalie told him that I was translating something from the Egyptian, he asked whether it was in the demotic or hieratic. I had to explain that I was only translating from French into English.

Gertrude Stein was always there—the permanent occupant of right wall center, knees wide-spread, dressed in stout tweeds and mountainclimbing boots; she seemed a game warden scrutinizing the birds. Miss Barney led me to her again and again but she gave no sign. I would usually go and hide or find some young person who could speak English.

There was also the Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre. At that time I thought she was very funny because I was very young and she was from a different epoch.

There was a charming lovely poet named André Rouveyre. Cocteau was there but not all the time. Gide came sometimes but not regularly. Eugene Jolas, who published *transition*, sometimes came. He published a poem of mine because Natalie introduced us. Ezra Pound was there but not all the time. Natalie took me to Pound once to show him a poem I

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Natalie Barney as Hamlet

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had written about Les Halles and asked him, "What do you think of this?" Pound corrected it, making little drawings all over the page. I must have it here somewhere. I never saw Natalie playing tennis with Pound, but I played with her at Beauvallon. She played tennis very gently and very well. She beat me.

I must have been there when George Antheil played his music, but I have trouble remembering because I saw a great deal of George later on. I once had an apartment under him here in New York, and I chiefly remember how he pounded the piano then.

I was there for a wonderful masked ball one night in the summer—was it 1923?—the garden was illuminated and 20 rue Jacob was alive. It was most amusing. I don't remember whether the fête was given for Poiret or designed by him, or exactly what Natalie wore: I'm hesitating between a harlequin and a clown. What did Natalie wear on her face? I remember no mask. She was never silly or funny.

One afternoon Isadora Duncan came, and another time Joyce was there, standing in the corner of the room, and I was very grieved because he could hardly see. But most of the time I never paid attention to anyone but Natalie. The others were like mannequins or props, and she had such extraordinary magnetism. She always wore a white Vionnet dress with large sleeves, what you might call a receiving gown.

Sometimes Natalie would forget her Fridays, and Berthe would have to go upstairs and tell her that people were waiting for her: "*Mademoiselle, il y a vingt personnes qui vous attendent.*" Then she would come down and *flow* into the room. She never began a conversation with the usual opening remarks; she'd always be caught in the middle of a conversation, like seaweed, and as she moved around the room there'd be this flow. I was completely aware of this remarkable way she had of approaching people as though she'd been there all the time. Of course she introduced people, but as though she were swimming along with them. She had the most extraordinary way of being present.

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Natalie had great charm, but she could get very angry and could be quite cruel. About her cooks, she said, "I always choose them blind and deaf. It doesn't matter, so long as they can see enough to put in the salt." Or about her chauffeurs, "I always choose them tubercular, my dear. They're necessarily careful." She had a kind of electric hansom cab, and she carried a small whip or riding crop, with which she used to tap the chauffeur on the shoulder when giving instructions.

She took me on literary excursions all over France—to Anatole France, who lived in a large beautiful house, and when she introduced me she said, "Doesn't she look like one of the Tanagras?" That was a nice little compliment. The next time I went to see him, there were lines of people, and he was dead. I went to his funeral too.

Natalie was quite fearless and thought nothing of walking home alone at night, wearing her cape and a little felt hat. She had a collection of those little hats in all shades of gray from Weatherby on the rue de Castiglione. Once when she had walked home from Passy I asked if she wasn't ever accosted. "Oh yes," said Natalie, "it happened just last night." Well, I asked, what did you do? "Oh, I said, *'Monsieur, vous n'êtes guère poli'*. Sir, you are hardly polite!"

VI

In May 1927 Natalie Barney wrote to Gertrude Stein, inviting her and her friends to join in a meeting of the salon to be held in her honor. The program included readings from Gertrude Stein and songs by Virgil Thomson, who had set several of her short pieces to music. Thomson and Gertrude Stein had met during the previous year and were close friends. He had met Natalie Barney about the same time, when his friend and fellow-composer George Antheil had premiered several works at the salon. Thomson was always welcome at Natalie Barney's Fridays, but he said that he "was not thick with her" and did not attend frequently, because the salon was literary rather than musical. Still, he was interested in Natalie Barney as a phenomenon, he heard much about her

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through Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, and he remembered everything with great clarity and wit.

Virgil Thomson: Natalie had really very little interest in music. Letters was her affair. She wasn't interested in painting very much either. The only musicians who ever made any kind of manifestation at her house in my experience were George Antheil and myself, and that in a very modest way.

On one occasion and through what influence I do not know, a string quartet of George Antheil's was played at Natalie's house. My small manifestation had to do with Gertrude Stein, because I had set some texts of Gertrude's to music and I could sing them. Natalie didn't have pianos downstairs, but there was a small one up in her bedroom or *petit salon* up there, and so at the end of the 5 o'clock tea party we all went upstairs and I did those.

Wickes: Mrs. Antheil told me that Olga Rudge performed there. Was that in the string quartet?

Thomson: No, more likely she performed a violin sonata of George's or some other violin work. Now George's support was always literary rather than musical. He was a great friend of Sylvia Beach, Ezra Pound, James Joyce—the rue de l'Odéon crowd—and it may have been through there that Natalie was induced to pay for a string quartet playing. Natalie was not one to spend money on music. On letters perhaps, and certainly on lesbian ladies who were in need.

Wickes: Did Gertrude Stein go the salon much?

Thomson: Oh, from time to time. If Natalie was throwing a ceremony for Gertrude, with works being read and honors being made, naturally, yes. Or if this were being done for somebody who was a close friend of Gertrude's, then she would. Or if Natalie sent her a little *pneumatique* saying so-and-so's coming on Friday, somebody she'd like to meet, some visiting English or Italian. I don't know how often she would go just casually or accidentally.

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Wickes: Was there rivalry between them?

Thomson: I can't conceive that there was any because they weren't doing the same thing. Gertrude didn't have a salon, didn't have regular days. Gertrude was home most afternoons by half past four or five o'clock, and sometimes close friends would drop in of an evening. And then Gertrude would throw a bit of a literary party from time to time, but that was all by invitation.

Gertrude and Natalie had a falling out at one point which was all about an indiscretion of Gertrude's. I got to talking to Gertrude and Alice one evening about Natalie, and I said, "Well, here she is a world-famous lesbian practitioner, but who does she do it with, and where does she get 'em?" Alice said—Alice was always thinking the worst—"I think from the toilets of the Louvre Department Store." Well, Gertrude wasn't entirely convinced by that, but it had suddenly been brought to her attention that for all her talk with Natalie, who was always representing the lesbian point of view, Gertrude didn't know really who Natalie slept with (unless there was a big love affair going on, which wasn't always) or what kind of people: whether it was always literary ladies or actresses or whether she had some kind of rough trade.

So Gertrude was out for a walk just after, and she encountered Gwen le Gallième (who was staying with Natalie) on the sidewalk in front of the Café des Deux Magots and with a *colossal* indiscretion started questioning Gwen about her hostess' habits—this right in front of the terrace of the Deux Magots, where hundreds of people were listening—not hundreds, but quite a number. Well, Gwen had sense enough not to tell her anything, but she did go home and tell Natalie what Gertrude had done, and Natalie was sore as hell.

Whether she ever mentioned the matter to Gertrude, I don't know, but she bided her time and got her revenge some time later. This story was told me by Esther Murphy, Gerald Murphy's sister, who had married John Strachey and later married Chester Arthur, but who was a practicing girl herself

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and a great friend of Natalie's. This was a big lunch party with twelve people or so, and Lesbia was being discussed and people identified, and when Gertrude and Alice were brought up, Natalie said, "Oh, nothing like that there at all. It's entirely innocent." That was her revenge, you see, to have made a fool of Gertrude in front of the lesbians and in such a way as to put Gertrude into the position of a complete innocent for having inquired into her life. There were several months when Natalie and Gertrude didn't speak or write.

Wickes: This suggests that they were in pretty frequent touch.

Thomson: Oh yes, she'd come to Gertrude's house, and Gertrude would come to hers, and they'd write little *pneumatiques* all the time. Besides which, they were exchanging literary people. If the Sitwells came over and were around Gertrude's, she'd probably take them to Natalie's or have Natalie in or furnish them to Natalie for some *soirée*. If you've got Edith Sitwell on your hands, you don't want to see her every day. You get somebody else to see her, which amuses her too, you get her around, distribute her.

Wickes: Now what happened at the Fridays? What was the routine?

Thomson: Well, it was the French style. There was tea at an enormous dinner table with lots of food. The French are terribly greedy at the end of the afternoon. It's a thing they don't have in their own lives, so that when they go to a party they all want to eat like mad. And there would be sandwiches and huge cakes and all sorts of things like that. And they would continue sitting at the tea table unless there were too many people, in which case they would move off into the parlor or sometimes into the garden in the summertime. It all depended on how many were there. Like any skillful hostess Natalie always saw to it that some were there, and sometimes would run up a much larger number if some star like Radclyffe Hall or maybe Rilke or someone like that would be around.

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Wickes: Now I'm curious about her literary patronage. I know that she gave something to the *Transatlantic Review*.

Thomson: Well, that would be Ford. Ford was very good at these general literary occasions salon style because he was an amiable fellow and could talk about anything and had nice manners.

There's a piece about Natalie in the Hemingway memoirs.

Wickes: The Hemingway memoirs is not a source I go to for information.

Thomson: Well, any snooting of lesbians on his part is pure tommyrot because he was very thick with Gertrude . . . and according to many persons in love with Gertrude . . . and I think she with him. That's why Alice had to get rid of him.

Wickes: Hemingway writes about the Temple à l'Amitié and Ezra Pound's scheme to get, as he puts it, Eliot out of the bank. Do you know anything about this?

Thomson: No. I know what he says, and it sounds perfectly reasonable. It was the kind of thing that Ezra would do, trying to get up a subscription so that this very successful poet already in his thirties could be got out of that bank job.

Wickes: But I haven't come across any records of this scheme to subsidize Eliot. It's the kind of thing Pound would propose, but I'm curious about Natalie Barney's role in such a venture as this.

Thomson: Well, it would all depend on whether she felt like giving any money, and that would depend on what was in it for her. Natalie was not a woman of facile generosity. She spent money graciously, she kept a very luxurious table, she had not only the Fridays but people were always going there to dinner and to lunch. She led an active generous social life. And

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people went there and stayed with her. And she helped to get their works published—she may even have paid a bit of money. But she was not an easy touch. No, no, no.

VII

Truman Capote went to Natalie Barney's salon *off and on for almost ten years. What follows is a condensation from a conversation held in January, 1975. His afternoon in the deserted studio with Miss Barney made enough of an impression to be adapted as a device to introduce a character in his novel-in-progress* Answered Prayers.

I met Natalie Barney in 1947 through Jenny Bradley who was the number one literary agent in France for American and English writers . . . a formidably handsome woman with a great sense of style and distinction. She introduced me to Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks and Alice Toklas and Mercedes d'Acosta who was Greta Garbo's friend and who created a great stir with her when she brought her to Natalie Barney's. They thought of Garbo as the *ne plus ultra* of what they were all about.

Natalie Barney was a small chirpy woman who dressed very conventionally. She loved the color gray. She had a gray car and a chauffeur dressed entirely in gray. She wore smart little gray suits. To look at her, and until you got into conversation with her, she seemed like a very refined lady from Shaker Heights. But of course she wasn't that at all.

She had a party every week. I can't recall what day of the week, but it was arranged so it didn't conflict with Marie Louise Bousquet who was the Paris editor of *Harper's Bazaar* and had her salons on Thursday. I don't think the two ladies were particularly friendly.

At Miss Barney's everyone met in a room with a huge domed ceiling of stained glass. The decor was totally turn-of-the-century, with a slightly Turkish quality about it—a kind of cross between a chapel and a bordello. There was always a big buffet on the side with the most marvelous things—I mean the

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most delicious kinds of strawberry and raspberry tarts in the dead of winter; and always champagne. Tea and champagne. The guests stood, or sat on all sorts of couches and hassocks. Sometimes she had rather curious, unexpected people—Marguerite Caetani, the publisher of *Botteghe Oscure*, Peggy Guggenheim, Djuna Barnes (they always spoke of her as the 'red-headed Bohemian'). . . But it was always very proper . . . talk about this concert or that concert, or so-and-so's paintings, or "Alice has a fabulous new recipe for eggs." The only shocking thing I ever remember was when Carl van Vechten came for tea and peed on the sofa by mistake. Everybody said, "Oh-oh, wait a minute. . ." and then they turned and down the line Esther Murphy, with the same problem, had lost control of *her* bladder and was peeing on *her* sofa.

Miss Barney's circle was not limited to lesbians . . . though certainly all the more representable dykes in town were on hand. She had *tout Paris*. Many of them were friends of Proust who had been characters in *Remembrance of Things Past*—like the Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre. Miss Barney would say to me very specifically that she wanted me to meet somebody because that person was so-and-so in Proust. She was trying to give me some sense of her particular time—which was typical of her generosity. She was certainly interested in celebrities—that was one of her hang-ups—but on the other hand she was not at all exploitative. She was one of those people who is always trying to bring other people together.

One day Miss Barney came by—I was living in the Hotel Pont Royal—to take me to luncheon, after which she wanted to show me something very unusual and extraordinary which very few people had ever seen. She didn't tell me what it was. So we went to a curious little neighborhood place near the Arc de Triomphe—not the sort of restaurant you would associate with Miss Barney—and afterwards she had the gray chauffeur park the gray car somewhere—and we started out walking. We walked for the longest time and finally we came to an ordinary *pension* (at least from the outside) and inside we went up in the cat-smelling, creaky elevator. Out on the landing she

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Djuna Barnes and Natalie Barney at Beauvallon, circa 1928

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rustled around in her bag and came up with this huge mysterious key. She put it in the door and she looked like a burglar at a safe-cracking. She said, "Now you stand out here because it's all in darkness inside and I have to go in and open the curtains a bit." So I waited and waited until it seemed like fifteen minutes had gone by when she came back out on her stubby-heeled gray silk shoes and she led me in as if we were going into Ali Baba's cave. We walked into an enormous room! I mean *really* enormous—like a sort of super-loft. The whole room was well-kept but it had the quality of total desertion—as if no one had been there for years. In the middle of the room was an easel with a half-finished painting on it, and beside it a table covered with tubes of paint, but all of them rather dry and dessicated-looking. Around the room the walls were covered with paintings shrouded with cloth, each of them with a little pull-cord next to the frame so you could pull it and the cloth would fold back and you could see the picture. I remember it was about four o'clock in the afternoon, a Paris winter afternoon, with that strange, gray pearly light.

And Miss Barney said, "This is the studio of my beloved friend, Romaine Brooks," and I'm quoting that just exactly—". . . my beloved friend, Romaine Brooks," and we began moving around the room and she would pull the cords and the cloth would slide back from these paintings and there they were: Lady Una Troubridge with a monocle in her eye; Radclyffe Hall in a marvelous hunting outfit with a terrific hunting hat. It was the all-time ultimate gallery of all the famous dykes from 1880 to 1935 or thereabouts. The paintings were wonderful, they really were . . . with terrific quality and style, and we looked at them, one after the other, and Miss Barney described who they were, many of them people I'd never heard of before . . . Renée Vivien, Violet Trefusis . . . and of course Miss Barney herself in a wonderful outfit with a pair of gloves here and a whip in the foreground . . . that's what made the whole thing so eerie.

Because it had so little to do with the Miss Barney I was standing with, this cozy little Agatha Christie-Miss Marple

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lady . . . and it was not that she was thirty years younger in the picture but that on the canvas she was this wild thing wearing a cravat, with her hand on her hip like *this*, and a *whip* over there . . . and I said, "Miss Barney" (I never called her anything but "Miss Barney" because . . . well, I was about twenty-five years old and anyone who was older than me I called "Sir" or "Ma'am" and with her it was just automatic) . . . I said, "Miss Barney, my goodness, really, is that really *you*?"

"Yes," said she, this chirpy pigeon-like little lady who had so little relation to this dominating woman with a whip.

On the studio walls were one or two portraits of men—one of Robert de Montesquieu in which he was wearing a black mourning coat with a black cravat and a white rose in his lapel, and then the other was a fabulous painting of Renaldo Hahn. He was a pianist, a great *personage* of the 1880's and 90's who was a tremendous friend of Proust. The painting shows him playing the piano with a piece of sheet music in front of him which stretches up off the piano into the sky, a great ribbon which is held at the far end by a band of angels. I know it sounds like the corniest thing in the world, but it was sensational.

There must have been a portrait of Remy de Gourmont. He was the ugliest man in Paris; he suffered from lupus. He was madly in love with Natalie Barney and wrote his *Letters to an Amazon* to her though if I've ever met a woman who was not an Amazon it was Natalie Barney. I always had the suspicion that she carried on with him to get even with Romaine Brooks for running off with Lady Una Troubridge. What a wonderful portrait *that* was—showing her in a marvelous riding habit, all in black and white, with a beautiful cravat, and this monocle in her eye . . .

Miss Barney was very frank about what we were looking at. She would explain the relationship between this person and that as we walked around the studio—and it was like an international daisy chain. "Now *she* (don't you think she's rather attractive?) ran off with Romaine which just broke my

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heart . . . for two years I couldn't get out of bed . . . I mean I had to put up with *that*, the two of them living in Fiesole with me in Paris crying my heart out until the relationship finally broke up and she began writing me all these passionate love letters'' . . . that sort of thing . . . all from this chirpy woman, rather plump. . .

I don't know what has happened to that room. Someone could write such a fantastic novella—just about that afternoon, and this rather usual-looking woman, and the pictures coming one after the other, and what they meant to her, and what the relationships of the various people were and what had happened to them. . .

VIII

Janet Flanner had said: ''Miss Barney is a perfect example of an enchanting person not to write about.'' But whatever her reservations, Miss Flanner was perfectly willing to talk about her for several hours, though she protested that her acquaintance with Natalie Barney was limited. Miss Flanner has been observing the Paris scene since 1921 and writing about it for the New Yorker *under the pseudonym Genêt since 1925. She appears under another pseudonym in Djuna Barnes'* Ladies Almanack, *which sympathetically caricatures Natalie Barney and her friends.*

Wickes: There is a reference to a time in the early days when Mata Hari rode nude on horseback in the Barney garden.

Janet Flanner: That was certainly one of the big events. And I also mentioned the cucumber sandwiches one always had at Natalie's. Her teas were so sumptuous as to be famous. She was an extraordinary person, Natalie . . . I simply don't think she was an acute literary critic . . . Her association with the old victim of lupus—what was his name?

Wickes: Remy de Gourmont.

Flanner: Yes. Well, that was not a very valid qualification for her literary reputation, was it?

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Wickes: How do you mean that?

Flanner: I mean that what she said about him furnished no proof of her comprehension of what was going on in literary society. It depended upon her chance meeting with this wretched man who had become a monster in a way, Remy de Gourmont. I've always thought that was an unfair advantage that fate and chance took of Natalie, to place him in her path.

She had an enormous recognition from the French because she spoke such beautiful French. She spoke French as she spoke English, which was at that time almost unnecessary. She knew a lot of elderly representatives of French academic society and learned society. I should think she was not at all a learned woman herself. I don't even know where she had her education. She must have received an enormous education from the women she frequented.

It was very difficult to corral Natalie so that she cut a path among the things in which one was interested or supposed that she was interested. I never felt that I knew her at all well, really. I rarely saw her alone. I used to breeze in and breeze out. I never knew Natalie's friends, except insofar as they were my friends in any case, like Eyre de Lanux. I should think that she was intimate with Colette more than with any other recorder of events. Colette must have been more satisfactory than almost anyone else in her life. Then there were the younger women, whom it would not be fair to name, since they were people with whom Natalie merely fell in love. This gives a very limited scope, because if you weren't in love with her—which I certainly was not, since I brought up the topic—you didn't know as much about her, and you couldn't appreciate her as much either.

Wickes: Well, there was Renée Vivien earlier.

Flanner: The way she spoke of Renée Vivien was one of the most shocking things in the world. "Oh," she said, "what a bore! Oh, such a tiresome young woman! Her love was almost as tiresome as everything else about her." She had been out all night, Natalie had, Lord knows where. She kept two sets of horses with a little brougham and a coachman; she must have

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kept two coachmen too, and I should think two or possibly four horses. So when she'd be out gadding about, talking, exercising her talents and her charms, it might very well be on toward dawn before she would head back toward her home in the rue Jacob.

Once Natalie had been out all night and thought about Renée Vivien on the way back home: "Oh, she's been so ill, I'd better stop and say good morning to her." And she found a florist shop open—it must have been spring—and she bought an enormous bouquet of *white* violets. You know how they appear in the florist shops in Paris in the springtime—not the purple but the white. And she bought a large bouquet of white violets and stopped by Renée Vivien's address. And the butler eventually answered the bell, with a clean napkin wound around his neck because he obviously hadn't had time to put his shirt on yet and bowed (he knew her well), "*Bonjour, Mademoiselle.*" And she said, "How is she this morning?" offering these white violets. And he said, "Oh, what tact Mademoiselle has. She has just this minute died, and they're *white* violets. *Quel chance pour vous, Mademoiselle, ça tombe si bien.*"

Wickes: What an amazing story!

Flanner: Yes, and no one has ever used it. Now that she told me, so I know it is *véridique*. And that is how she discovered that Renée Vivien had died. She is buried in that odd little walled cemetery up there on the Place Maréchal Foch, I think it is, that looks straight across to the Tour Eiffel. And one day we happened to be driving by in her car, going someplace in the afternoon, and she looked at the cemetery, and that's when she said, "What a bore! What a bore . . . and so faithful!" Then she told me about the violets and said, "You see, love doesn't make people any more interesting. It makes them more endearing possibly, or perhaps more tiresome too," she said, always going along in her absolutely detached voice. She was a commentator, and she would laugh. She would announce this fact, like that, then give this little crow of laughter

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as she participated in history, and it was really a terminal point. Then she'd either go on to something else or she wouldn't. You might have to supply the next observation.

Wickes: Wasn't the Duchesse de Clermont-Tonnerre also an important figure in her life?

Flanner: I think she was fonder of Colette than of any other woman in French society, but she was almost equally devoted and appreciative of Madame de Clermont-Tonnerre, whom I also knew—excellent woman, so reliable, so correct, always so accurate, Madame de Clermont-Tonnerre. There are references to her in one of my *Paris Journals* which I had gleaned from Natalie. She was the only great lady of the few that I knew—because I did not frequent French society—who remembered her childhood. I think that she had been brought up in a period in which the young male members of the family were always dukes. And when she wrote her memoirs, she wrote about life as it actually had been, with not a sigh of regret. She thought the whole thing had been rather preposterous. She accepted the new regime and the new realities with extraordinary comprehension because she was a woman of fantastic social vitality. So she moved from epoch to epoch, and when she was in her sixties and writing *Aux Temps des Equipages*, it might just as well have been a Daimler she was writing about as horses, because she recognized the movement of transportation.

Wickes: You spoke earlier of Natalie Barney keeping horses and a brougham. When did she make the transition to motor cars?

Flanner: I have no idea. She kept an elderly car which never had had a horse in connection with it but still rather smelled like a stable. It was an old-fashioned kind of car, and it had an equine smell.

Wickes: What about Romaine Brooks? Wasn't that another life-long attachment?

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Flanner: Oh yes, I expect she was the one that Natalie loved the most. Her life had its astral influences, and Romaine was certainly one of the stars. I saw Romaine every time she came to Paris. She used to come in June, and she always took a room just two doors down from mine in the Hôtel Continental, a very modest little room in back, looking over what I loved the most of all, the Tuileries Gardens. We never communicated with each other, except a note saying, "Now when are we lunching?" Then we would meet downstairs in the Continental, and she'd come down with her fresh stock tied—she wore a gentleman's stock. She was a handsome woman and an excellent painter. Those portraits she did were very observant, though they were already *démodé*. Romaine, I'm sure, never paid any attention to Picasso except to say, "Oh yes, I daresay." Romaine and Clermont-Tonnerre were the most remarkable women around Natalie as far as I knew, but this would be a very limited slice of Natalie's life that I knew about, because I liked these two women, I enjoyed their company, I enjoyed their recollections, I enjoyed what they used out of life.

Now what can I tell you about Natalie? What interests you most?

Wickes: Well, I'm interested in the salon principally and particularly in the period between the wars when it was supposedly flourishing. I want to know who went there and what the ritual was.

Flanner: Cucumber sandwiches. Berthe, her servant, was part of the ritual. I always had a little hugger-mugger with Berthe at the front door. I used to exchange gossip before I went in, picking up notes: who was in, who was dying.

Did you meet Madame Janine Lahovary? Splendid woman. She was a great figure toward the end of Natalie Barney's life. Her sons took it very hard. They said, "We wouldn't mind Mother having a lover, so many mothers have lovers. But Mother's lovers are women, and we find it very difficult to deal with the scoffing of our schoolboy companions."

I don't really see that you can use anything much that I've

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collected, because there is no question about it, Natalie lived as an oddment because of her sexual tastes.

Wickes: What about the Académie des Femmes?

Flanner: Never heard of it. I'm a very spotty recollector. Tell me what it was.

Wickes: She writes about it in one of her books of memoirs. And yesterday I saw Virgil Thomson, and he talked about it.

Flanner: Oh well, Virgil of course knows about everything. There isn't a sex that was ever invented that Virgil wouldn't be able to follow its manipulations and circles. In that way he really is a mathematician.

Wickes: Well, perhaps I could ask you about individuals then. Djuna Barnes, for instance.

Flanner: I knew her very well indeed. Djuna of course is here in New York.

Wickes: Yes, but she won't see me.

Flanner: No, she's too ill. She was very devoted to Natalie. Deplored the life she led. But a good many people would say that about Djuna's life, as far as that's concerned. Djuna was one of the strongest personalities around Natalie and one of the most devoted, one of the most appreciative. She went to the tea parties—when were they, Fridays?

Wickes: Yes, Fridays.

Flanner: That's what I thought vaguely. Well, it's toward the end of the week. Gives the ladies something to talk about and drive over to see each other about over the weekend. The food was delicious. Berthe was an extremely good cook. She was the only person around Natalie who had a husband. I'll see her when I go back to Paris. Her first question is always and invariably, "*Et Mademoiselle Djuna, que fait-elle maintenant? Ah,*

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Berthe serving tea in the salon

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quelle femme!'' Berthe was so loyal she practically took on Natalie's tastes.

Wickes: She told me that it was through Djuna Barnes that she started working for Natalie Barney.

Flanner: I didn't know that. Well, I think Djuna and I were more fond of Berthe and certainly knew her better than anyone else. I didn't frequent Natalie's house to that extent, but Berthe always included me as one of the pillars. I think Djuna and I had more pillar-like figures in Berthe's recollections than anyone else. You've seen the little dining room there?

Wickes: Yes, but it's in a very dilapidated state now.

Flanner: My dear fellow, it looked dilapidated even then. Not *so* dilapidated, but it was certainly not fresh. I took some English woman in there once, and she was curious about those paintings of the nymphs hanging from the ceiling, and she said, ''Is it permitted for me to bend my head back and look at the ceiling? What is it going to be?'' And I said, ''Oh, it's quite decent, quite correct. Fear nothing.'' Everything was so *démodé*. Dolly Wilde declared that Natalie's house was so frowsty and so damp that if you turned up the chairs you would find oysters growing under them. No one ever sat in the drawing room—that's where Dolly said the oysters grew under the chairs, but they didn't in the little dining room. That was a rather lively place; it looked straight out into the garden. We all clustered around the teapot. I was never upstairs in my life. Toward the end Natalie broke out—I think at Madame Lahovary's insistence—in pale blue silk sheets. Well, I thought that was a luxury! Now what is the name of the man who owns her house?

Wickes: Michel Debré.

Flanner: Michel Debré, he has a porcine face. The most im-

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portant thing is what is going to happen to her house? I have no idea.

Wickes: I believe Michel Debré was just waiting for her to die before renovating, obliterating, who knows what.

Flanner: Renovating and obliterating, I should think, would be the same thing.

Wickes: What happened at the tea parties?

Flanner: Introductions, conversation, tea, excellent cucumber sandwiches, divine little cakes Berthe baked, and then the result: a new rendezvous among ladies who had taken a fancy to each other or wished to see each other again. Purely social.

Wickes: Was there never any music?

Flanner: Oh no, I don't think Natalie knew one tune from another.

Wickes: She told me that she was musical, that she'd played the violin as a girl.

Flanner: Oh, I think there's a terrible early photograph that proves that. There's a series of photographs of her early youth that are really quite painful. She's acting like a dryad and she peeks from behind tree trunks in the Bois. You know how bad taste was at that time.

I feel sorry for you.

Wickes: You mean for undertaking this subject?

Flanner: Yes, because I've never entered into anything without knowing which way I was headed. And on this, you see, I'm not competent. I know these two or three anecdotes, which in each case I think are invaluable. That one about the

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white violets is precious. I can just see that butler with the clean napkin swathed around his probably scrawny neck: "*Oh Mademoiselle, comme ça tombe bien. Elle vient de mourir. Vous êtes juste à l'instant.*" Natalie was enchanted with that. There was a sense of the apropos in Natalie which was rather alarming. The woman had been a bore for her, and there she arrived, accidentally apropos. That's the way Natalie liked to be apropos. She could never have contrived it. I've always wondered with whom she'd spent the night—if it was someone frightfully important.

Wickes: There are those who blame her for the death of Renée Vivien.

Flanner: Well, yes, she was perishing of unrequited love, and also she led so debauched a life in the waste of her affections and in the strain on her gastric system of living on sweets and champagne. No one ever knew who the rich woman lover was who supported her.

Her power over Renée was a thing which impressed the ladies. She would receive these impetuous messages brought by a coachman with another groom waiting outside: "Come at once." And wherever she was and whatever the ladies were all doing, she left at once and followed the very imperious demand to turn up wherever it was.

Wickes: Hemingway mentions Natalie Barney in *A Moveable Feast* in connection with Pound's project to get Eliot out of the bank. Do you know anything about this?

Flanner: I don't know. I shouldn't think Natalie had been given to any elaborate charitable enterprises. Natalie was not one for good works. She was one for bad works if they interested her. There was a reverse medal in the family; that was her sister, Mrs. Dreyfus—a very dull woman.

Wickes: Natalie Barney knew Ezra Pound well. She used to

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play tennis with him. That's hard to imagine, isn't it?

Flanner: I can imagine that costume: flat-heeled white shoes with the toes turning up, and her hair all aswathe in the breeze. Her hair must have been extraordinary when she was young, this long web of blonde hair.

The only woman who had at that time extraordinary style sartorially was Mata Hari. *There* was a woman who was equal to any event. Natalie was the one who supplied me with the information on what she wore the day she was shot. She traced down the young lieutenant or captain who had given the signal to fire, the one who said she stood so still it made him tremble. So one has an accurate story instead of that tawdry imagined sable coat over nude flesh invented by someone who wrote for the most scurrilous kind of literary weekly.

Wickes: Was Natalie Barney involved with Mata Hari?

Flanner: Only insofar as she came to her tea party. Mata Hari wanted to ride in on an elephant. But Natalie said, "No, you'll get in the way of Berthe. There are cookies and tea, and we can't have an elephant stamping around in my garden. Nonsense!" I don't think it was at her house that Mata Hari gave that warrior's dance from whatever remote country she had picked it up in and noticed that one of the ladies' feet looked very large and guessed that it was a husband who had sneaked in—obviously a man of intemperate desires. She was ready to run him right through on the spot with a harpoon.

Natalie was a woman who was never captive. All the rest of them were—to each other or in one way or another. She was an essentially independent American woman from Cincinnati. She was remarkable at the last. She lay on a little straight sofa in the drawing room. This was shortly before her death, toward the end of any public appearance that she ever permitted or ever enjoyed. She laughed the same as ever. There was a curious hard American stoical quality about her. She was wonderful as she lay there on that narrow uncomfort-

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able sofa. And there she lay, already in state, laughing, never loudly. She never laughed loudly, never in her life. Nothing was ever that funny to Natalie.

Natalie Barney by Eyre de Lanux

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David Ignatow

"I DREAM I HURL A SPEAR . . ."

I dream I hurl a spear into the body of my love. I am brutal, but the spear begins to glow along its shaft and transfixes me. I stand covered in its radiance, unable to move, magnetized towards the spear that I reach out to touch and then grasp and stroke and carry myself forward along its length until I have touched the body of my love itself at the point where the spear has entered. I sob, I shake in convulsions and the body of my love bends forward to comfort me as I support myself against it in a paroxysm of leaving my body.

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Two Poems by Louis Jenkins

CONFESSIONAL POEM

I have this large tattoo on my chest. It's like a dream I have while I'm awake. I see it in the mirror as I shave and brush my teeth or when I change my shirt or make love. What can I do? I can't remember where I got the tattoo. When in the past did I live such a life? And the price of having such a large tattoo removed must be completely beyond reason. Still, the workmanship of the drawing is excellent, a landscape 8x10 inches in full color, showing cattle going downhill into a small western town. A young man, who might have been my great grandfather, dressed as a cowboy and holding a rifle, stands at the top of the hill and points down toward the town. The caption beneath the picture reads: "Gosh I didn't know we were this far west."

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THE WAY

Even if you believe in Jesus there comes a moment when everything sinks. It is that moment when the fire collapses in the grate and the skinny sticks lie there smouldering, broken like the bones of the saints. See, even though you have come only this far your Ever-Ready batteries have begun to fail and it *is* a swamp . . . Or say it's a city street, but the first person you meet is a small man wearing a straw hat and striped overalls that are clean and starched. His hands and feet are very small and only the tips of his shiny black shoes stick out from the big legs of his pants. He has something in his pocket that shines, might be a cross or a switchblade. He asks your name and says he knows some of your family. He's crazy. He shows you a dance in which the movements are something like those of a goose. It is called "The Dance of People Who Look Just Alike." He says he will tell you a story about a woman he knows who has lived for years above a grocery store. He knows her very well and will take you to meet her. Now you have lingered here so long it is growing dark. There is no one on the street. You will have to spend the night here and you had hoped to make it as far as Cincinnati.

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A. G. Sobin

FOUND POEM: WIND FELLS OKLAHOMA'S ANCIENT CHIMNEY ROCK

WANOKA (AP) Chimney Rock, which stood for centuries on the Oklahoma plain as a towering guide for covered wagons crossing the treacherous Cimarron River, has fallen victim to the same forces which created it. "Moisture and wind, the tools that sculpted it, reduced the eerie formation to a heap of rubble," said Ernie Crumpler, Oklahoma University geologist.

"I've fished these parts all my life," said Abe Finley, long-time Wanoka fisherman, "and anymore, with old Chimney Rock gone, I can't get my bearings."

Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Decker, a ranch couple on their way to feed their cattle, were the first to see that the geological oddity no longer stood in its accustomed place. "He said, 'Chimney Rock's gone'," Mrs. Decker said Thursday. "I was looking the other direction and thought 'Oh, it's only hidden by dust in the air', but I looked over and sure enough the only thing you could see was a bump on the hill."

"It's quite an experience to look at something you've seen all your life and suddenly you can't even tell where it was," Mrs. Decker said, turning to go feed their cattle. She was the first to see that her husband, Marvin Decker, no longer stood in his accustomed place. "He said, 'I'm over here'," Mrs. Decker said Thursday. "I was looking the other direction," she explained, "and all I could see was a heap of rubble."

"It's because they couldn't get their bearings with old Chimney Rock gone," O.U. geologist Crumpler said, hidden by dust in the air.

It was believed that the chimney, which stood fifty or sixty feet tall, fell during a wind storm about noon on Tuesday. Crumpler said, "As no one witnessed its birth, there was no one to see it go . . . heavy winter snows and recent torrential

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rains apparently weakened the base and the wind storm blew it down.''

''The tower stood on private land and was accessible only by a road hidden by dust in the air,'' Mrs. Decker said. From the main road it appeared that only a few small pieces of the tower were still on the pedestal. She said, however, that some people in pickup trucks had gone to the rock and reported that some boulders big enough to fill a pickup truck were intact, ''but it would take a towering guide to lift any of 'em in,'' Decker added in a blast of moisture and wind.

''It has always been one of our prominent landmarks,'' said Mrs. Louise Fisher, editor of the Weeds County Enterprise here. ''It's like a big chunk of our early history is now gone—as if it were hidden by dust in the air,'' she said, ''or carried off in a pickup truck.''

Mrs. Decker turned around to feed their cattle and was the first to see that her husband, Marvin Decker, no longer stood in his accustomed place. ''Crumpler said, 'Marvin's gone' '' Mrs. Decker said Thursday. ''I was looking the other direction and thought 'Oh, I've just lost my bearings or he's hidden by dust in the air', but I looked over and the only thing you could see was Marvin collapsed there like a heap of rubble.''

Abner Moss, Weeds County coroner, said that heavy winter snows and recent torrential rains, as well as the shock of losing Chimney Rock, probably weakened his condition so much that a gust of wind and moisture blew him over about noon on Thursday. ''But,'' he said, ''because of dust in the air, no one there could see him go.''

''The fallen victim has always been one of our prominent citizens,'' editor Fisher said. Mrs. Edna Decker, Decker's mother, reminisced about her son on her way to feed their cattle: ''Why I remember once when he was just a baby, a rock from our tumble-down chimney fell on him. I was looking the other direction,'' she said, ''but sure enough when we pulled off his little cap, the only thing you could see was a bump on his head.'' ''Today, you can't even see where

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it was,'' Decker's wife added. ''It's quite an experience to look at something you've seen all your life and suddenly you can't even see where it was.''

''It's a real oddity,'' Crumpler called in an eerie voice from the direction of the treacherous Cimarron River, hidden by dust in the air. ''Anymore, around here nothing's going to be the same,'' Mrs. Fisher added. Mrs. Decker said ''Thursday, if you want to get your bearings.''

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Adam Lefevre

THE DIFFICULT BIRTH OF MR. WALT DISNEY

One fine morning in a bright green garden, an old man sat crying. His beard wound round him like a friendly serpent. The big sky was so blue, and the little birds singing. The smiling sun cast warm nets over him, as the gentle breeze did blow. The old man looked up. His eyes were so red from crying. *I want! I want!* he cried in his old broken voice.

The birds stopped singing. They swallowed their songs and flew away. The sun frowned and sailed off in its dark cloudboat. The old man sat crying. And the air was so still.

The beautiful flowers jumped down their stems, and the stems then darted into the ground. And the trees took back their leaves till the garden was quite brown. Then little white patches appeared on the ground, like a rash that grew. It was snow! coming back! It flew up, up into the clean white air!

And when the frozen curtain was up, geese honked in a bony sky. There was a baby boy, brilliant and crying in the cold.

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Cancer of the Testicles

David Evanier

I

I had not seen Samuel for years, but his letters annoyed me. They were so melancholy, so sad. I couldn't figure it out. In 1970 I returned to Manhattan for the summer and called him. "I'm double the size I was when you knew me; so is Doris; we eat all the time. Don't you?" We made a date and I broke it—too depressing.

Following that, several letters came. The contents varied, but always the same refrain: "So many things to say; we must get together soon; you have been a better and truer friend than I." Puzzling to me, since I did not understand what we had to say to each other, and why I was such a good friend. First a letter came about the sudden death of his father from cancer. I remembered Mr. Weintraub's grocery store; Samuel's Marxist stories and poems condemning his father for ringing up sales on the case register, and conveniently forgetting to put in a bar of soap, a can of soup, when packing the customer's purchases in bags. The next letter told of the death of his mother from cancer. Then good

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news: his novel published. He inscribed it to me: "To Bruce—There were four people who thought I might be a writer. You were one of them, and your confidence and friendship were very important to me . . . during dark, difficult days. Sam." Not true, unfortunately—I never believed in Sam as a writer. I hope the other three did. I read the book which was, in a strange, unreal way, about black power. All the attitudes were proper, and, if set down more convincingly, might have netted Sam a home in Scarsdale, a sale to Hollywood, a livelihood. But true to Sam's writing style as I remembered it, everything was tone-deaf: a black's Afro was "crunchy"; his lips "like accordian folds." What emerged incessantly, everywhere, was the theme of masturbation. The characters could not keep their hands off themselves, no matter how militant. Everyone: the beautiful blacks, the fuzzy liberals, the reactionary dogs . . . at every free moment was settling down with a wad of toilet paper. It was uncanny in such a short, serious and shadowy book. And while it was not well-written, it had an authority: there was no doubt that here was something the author really knew about.

I waited a long time to write Samuel about the novel, and then suggested who might like it. I compiled a list of people I did not respect. Samuel wouldn't know it, and he would respect them himself, and they really might enjoy the book. He wrote back sadly but with thanks: he had already mailed the book to all the people I mentioned, but no one had reviewed the book.

No one.

During an interim period there was a letter from Samuel's brother, Moshe, from Montreal. Ten pages written in hand on notepaper, crumpled and hard to decipher. Moshe was now 26, eight years younger than Samuel. I thought of him, a kid of 17, singing freedom songs badly in Washington Square. He'd heard I was starting a magazine, and in the cool, lovey-dovey, hip lingo of these days (and not so different from the way he sounded ten years before) he said he was enclosing his fine poems, that I might use them or tear them up or merely

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keep them, but that he hoped they would make me "happy and content."

I remember a day in 1960—we are all at Coney Island in Samuel's car. I am singing softly to myself the World Youth Freedom song. Samuel shushes his wife Doris and Moshe; he puts his hand on Moshe's shoulder and says, "Listen." There is silence. "Bruce," he says to me, "sing louder. You have a beautiful voice."

That is how truly tone-deaf Samuel was, and is. *No one*, ever, has praised my singing. No one has ever had reason to. That day in the car, Moshe listened, said "Yeah, yeah" to Samuel and joined me with his guitar. I felt my voice rising in strength, believing with them, and sang all the way into Manhattan.

Another time, another day: Samuel mentions a hit song by the McGuire Sisters. The refrain goes: "May you find someone to love, as much as I love you." He says, with a twinkle and a smile, "Bruce, I'll bet you love that song."

Embarrassed and taken by surprise, I admit, "How did you know?"

He turned to Doris. "You see? I know, Bruce. It's fine . . . it's good that you're like you are. Don't be embarrassed."

I must have been between girls at the time. Samuel had taken to analyzing me, explaining he had never seen me as a person before, but, as he put it, "a giant."

A long silence after the letter about the book. A letter came from Samuel when I was in bed with hepatitis last year. "Oh no," I said to my wife. "What can it be this time? He must have cancer." We laughed.

I put the letter away for days. Not because I thought that. I placed it between pages of books, in cubbyholes, in drawers. I opened it one day: "I have cancer of the testicles," Samuel wrote me.

II

In 1960 I was working as a typist at an encyclopedia firm. I shared a cubicle in the office with a concert pianist named

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Arthur. Arthur was in his mid-twenties and he spent three months of the year as a reservist in the Army. Arthur was a type almost extinct today—extremely well-adjusted, friendly open eyes beaming through horn-rimmed spectacles, his fingers flying over the typewriter keys, his coffee breaks fifteen minutes to the second, respectful, on the ball. Did he like the Army?

"Sure! We all have to do it, don't we?"

"But you're an artist."

He glanced nervously over the rim of our cubicle.

"You're not a sour apple, are you?" he said.

God, he was happy. He cleaned his fingernails, he had a girl who kept him in line. He was living proof that the artist could be a good citizen, devoid of nasty thoughts and incendiary attitudes.

He had me pegged. "You're the first one to go on your coffee break and the last to leave it," he said, tapping his fingers. "I like my work. I like my girl. I like the Army. You've been late to work every morning this week."

"What kind of music do you play anyway?" I asked him.

He got edgier and edgier about me. I felt I was his conscience. I felt I was everybody's conscience. He wanted no part of it. The only thing I was sneaky about was the Army. They were breathing down my neck. I had so many plans going for avoiding it that I couldn't keep up with myself. A) Radicalism. B) Pacifism. C) Mental Illness. D) Criminality. E) Homosexuality. F) Flight to Cuba. G) Near-sightedness. Each stance required a different behavior pattern, and I couldn't make up my mind. I visited Communist Party headquarters, grinning and waving at the cameras I knew were hidden all over the building. Once inside the building, a comrade spotted me and started to call out "Bruce O—" "NO NO NO!" I screamed, looking around for microphones, "HA HA HA! HI HOW ARE YOU." On the way out of the building, I placed my hands in front of my face as a shield. By the time I got to the Automat I was breathless and terrified. I went back to my room, dug up a stack of *Daily*

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Workers and burnt them in the toilet. It took hours.

I had chosen, at that point in my life, a psychiatrist to go with my life style. Dr. Harold Jackson was black, left-wing, and short. He had a house in Greenwich Village, he was friendly with Langston Hughes and dabbled in poetry himself.

There was no real difference between sitting in Dr. Jackson's waiting room and sitting in his office. This took me about a year to figure out. He would greet me in the waiting room and chat about politics, weather, restaurants, nutrition, exercise. I would charge into his office, sweating with neurotic symptoms, and wait to get down to business.

Chuckles, frowns, bits of philosophy wafted through the air.

"I can't breathe!" I said. "My father—my mother—that bastard at the office—" I tried to get it all out; there was only an hour.

Dr. Jackson looked at his fingernails, clucked his tongue, paused, and finally said,

"Let me ask you this, Bruce—"

I strained forward. "Yes?"

"Are you . . . shall we say, tense?"

Gobbling for air, I said between gritted teeth that I was.

"I thought so. Many of my patients are. Tense, anxious, nervous. Do you frequently feel this way—"

"Yes—"

"I must confess . . . I rather thought so. . . ."

"I want to go to Cuba."

"Oh?"

"I can't breathe here; the capitalists have seen to that all right. I don't exist—I'm just a writer, that's all. A useless commodity. Those Army bastards are just waiting to kill me. Who will know? I'll be dead before I'll have had the chance to be alive—to live, to publish my book. Wiped out, like a spot on the wall. No way. No way. Will you help me?"

"Certainly!"

"You will?" I leaned forward. "I was thinking of a

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freighter . . . or a plane via Moscow—''

''Now, now, Bruce, travel to Cuba is forbidden!''

''That's why I thought Moscow first . . .''

''I think, Bruce, that life . . . sometimes . . . has its gray moments. I want you to know that I, too, have sometimes, oh, fits of . . . pique . . . when things don't go just as I might have planned. Do you know about the Club Valhalla?''

I stared at him.

''The Club Valhalla, Bruce, is very pleasant. Singles mingle there. They have the most charming dances, and, heavens, all sorts of fun things. Why don't you give them a jingle and see if the rates have gone up. They were most reasonable when I went there.''

''But I don't want a bourgeois dating club—''

Dr. Jackson laughed. ''Oh my no, they're most serious. They're quite mature politically, I can assure you.''

''But about Cuba—''

Dr. Jackson looked sad. ''Yes. This country's attitudes toward that valiant land are so silly. You can't even get a good Havana cigar.''

He ushered me out, smiling, cheerful. He was black, he was radical. I saw him on the streets of the Village with blonde girls who towered over him. He looked up at them, grinning, and patted them on the ass.

III

I met Samuel on a coffee break at the encyclopedia. He had an owlish look, very pleasant. He was an assistant editor, 28 years old. I was simmering; he was placid. I slipped him a copy of the *Daily Worker*. After work, he was waiting for me outside. ''Come home, meet my wife, Doris.'' I traveled on the subway with him to Brooklyn.

They were opposites. ''Doris, meet a radical, a poet, a fine thinker and a dear friend, Bruce Orav!''

She was tiny and flat-chested. ''Take it easy, Samuel. How do ya do?''

''This is wonderful coffee, Doris. Doris is a fine cook.

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Wait, you'll see, Bruce. And a wonderful little wife. Sitting here like this, I can tell, Bruce, we'll be good friends. I didn't know there were any radicals left. Doris' mother Hilda organized the steel workers, Bruce. She's still there in Bedford, Mass., in her little house. I laughed at her ideas. But when you talk about them, I begin to understand—''

''It's instant coffee, Sam,'' Doris said. ''Take it easy.''

''But tell me this, Bruce. What about the Soviet Union? Isn't it a drab, poverty-stricken place?''

Samuel sat at my feet with his coffee, looking up at me.

''The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics—'' I began.

''Doris, turn the lamp the other way. There. Look at his profile. Did anyone ever tell you that you have a Greek profile, Bruce? Go ahead, I was interrupting.''

''—is the first land of Socialism. Surrounded on all sides by enemies, mistakes were made. But I'm sick of all the crap! Corrupt? Treehouses! Honeymooners live in treehouses! That's how corrupt it is. And Stalin was a reader of Tolstoy!—''

I was inspired by the dimmed lighting, Samuel at my feet, their quiet, rapt attention.

We talked the night. ''This has been very fine. I can't tell you, Bruce, how you're opening our eyes. I have an idea. Sleep here tonight. Tomorrow we don't go to the capitalist cockroaches' office. We continue talking. You'll educate us. We'll learn. This is fine. Isn't it, Doris? This is really fine.''

She stared at Samuel. ''Are you crazy?''

He laughed and grinned. ''No, no, I'm serious. I feel Bruce knows. I have that feeling. I don't think I'm wrong.''

''He can sleep here, of course, but tomorrow you work.''

He patted her on the head. ''Little Doris. Isn't she sweet angry like that? It's good to express anger, Doris. And to express love too. It's very good. It's time we began to let go.''

I slept on a couch that night. There was no sexual action from the bed. Only later would I discover that after three years of marriage, Doris and Samuel had accomplished an historical feat equal to Lenin's five-year plan:

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Doris was a virgin.
Samuel, also.

IV

December in Far Rockaway. It was very cold, the wind whipping against our wooden cottage, the sea spray on the windows. The boardwalk was deserted, the steeplechase and the merry-go-rounds closed. Once, long ago, the Jewish workers considered summer weekends in Far Rockaway a big deal; then came the borscht belt; then the Concord and the Riviera and Las Vegas. Our bungalow was where the workers used to come in summers. Clustered among hundreds of other wooden shacks, all of them vacant, we now lived, Samuel, Doris and I, in the two rooms, for thirty dollars a month. We had an electric heater, blankets, our Marxist texts and pictures of Lenin.

People in the neighborhood found us. Even though it was 1960, once a week a horse-drawn wagon stopped at our door: the milkman. Cards were left from representatives of Father Coughlin, Frederick's of Hollywood, the *Police Gazette*, a committee to drive the British out of Palestine.

Samuel had quit his job and we lived on unemployment insurance. He was very, very happy.

At night we huddled around the fireplace, freezing. "Talk, Bruce," Samuel would say.

"What about?"

"Anything is fine. Really, Bruce. You have a way of saying things. Doris agrees with me. Or sing for us. Or read us your poetry. Any of these things would be fine. Tell us about when you were a little boy and your father took you to the Palace to see all the old time performers like Belle Baker, or the Laff Movie on Forty-second Street and the Automat afterwards—"

"But I already have—"

"I would like to hear it again. Or about being a writer. What it means to you to be a writer. I would like you to go into that again. The way you would sneak up the stairway to

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the roof with your first girl friend. Doris likes the way you talk about that. Or your intuitions about Stalin's innate kindness and decency. Or the venal behavior of the Trotskyites."

I talked on into the night, and sometimes I thought that Doris was pressing her thin body against mine in the candlelight. I was between girl friends. I pressed back.

V

During the first months, at night I listened for stirrings from their bed across the room. There weren't any. Doris vomited a lot, and sometimes he told her happy stories about their present situation: adult fairy tales. "Baloney," was Doris' response.

Samuel had a thing about shoes. I watched him hasten to put Doris' shoes on for her. "Samuel, what the hell are you doing?"

Samuel looked up at her from the floor. "Helping my little Doris."

"Oh for Christ's sake."

"You look so cute when you get angry."

She kicked him. He did not move away.

VI

Samuel had this certain look, or gleam in his eyes sometimes, that came and went. You knew something was cooking when it was there. On the subway, he would stare at a girl's shoes and that gleam was there. At first I thought I was imagining it, except that I had to keep tapping his shoulder to tell him we had reached our stop. I was only dimly aware of what he was doing. We never talked about it.

VII

About this look of Samuel's: "That look," Doris would say. Samuel would laugh then, devilishly, or giggle. He had that look one day when he said, "Bruce, I feel it is time for us to take a more active part in the struggle." A picture comes

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to mind of that period, a picture of Samuel in my scrapbook in a Lincoln Brigade demonstration. The picture turned up in the *Daily Worker*. A line of demonstrators was grimly walking up and down, glaring at the photographer. Except one, who was grinning and waving and flashing a V sign.

On a momentous day, Samuel and I visited the home of the Chairman of the Far Rockaway branch of the Communist Party, Dr. Hyman Bernhardt. Bernhardt, a broad-shouldered, solid man with curly red hair, greeted us at the door with dancing, suspicious eyes. He ushered us in. He stared at my briefcase. "What a lovely briefcase," he said, and took it from me. We had known him for several months.

His hands roamed over it. "May I look inside? It's so handsome."

"Yes."

His hands roamed through the briefcase as he went on talking to us. "Very nice indeed," he said, and handed the briefcase back to me.

He introduced us to his wife and daughter, and took us into his private study. "Two cracked ribs," he said, nodding.

"What?" I said.

"My daughter Naomi. Two cracked ribs. She never told me. A doctor friend informed us. In the Washington demonstration."

"Wonderful," Samuel said.

Dr. Bernhardt looked sharply at him. "Yes . . . that too. But that is quite right, Sam. Wonderful in what it reveals to us of the determination of the youth."

On the wall there was a picture of Stalin, and underneath it a quotation from Brecht: "They say that we are evil. But we are the end of evil."

"You're a writer, Bruce. My wife and I saw a play by Tennessee Williams the other night. What magic that fella has . . . what magic. It was . . . excellent. And the marvelous revolutionary anger of Kowalski. In my days of youth, I traveled the South, organizing the party. He knows the South. My eighth book, incidentally, on black slavery will

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be issued by the Red Hammer Press, in March. It demonstrates, I think, indubitably, the incredible, scientific superiority of the blacks of that day in their terrible bondage. I don't know if you are acquainted with my work. . . .''

He paused.

We both said we certainly were.

''. . . but I have endeavored to pierce the lies and . . . dare I say . . . deliberate, disgusting, and scurrilous myth perpetrated by the white Southern oligarchy that the blacks accepted their situation. The scholarly research that I devoted to this book was not easy. One can do many things with so-called facts. Therefore, in this book, my thesis: that one black slave out of three not only revolted against their slave masters, but called them ''the man'' . . . and toward each other . . .''

He lowered his voice. ''To each other, these fine, brave men, in celebration of their blackness and in their extraordinary revolutionary awareness, these men . . . addressed each other . . . as . . . Comrade.''

He paused, walked across the room and looked out the window. ''Comrade . . . that word of fraternity and brotherhood, one hundred years ago . . . that is my discovery, and I trust that despite the blackness and cowardice of these days of fear, the book will be passed from house to house, that it will be known and help to ignite the fires that will sweep this country. . . .

''Yes. They are with us . . . but they are still afraid. Tennessee Williams—''

''Really?'' I said.

Bernhardt let it hang in the air. ''Faulkner, Hemingway, Frost . . . they are waiting. I can feel it. Here, in the quiet streets of Far Rockaway, the masses also wait. I go to my office at headquarters daily. I climb the stairs, push open the door. Not a soul comes in. But I remember when those rooms were filled with people. A special room for babies and children. Cookies. Cakes. Games. Those people are *waiting*. They are angry. But now they will be joined by their black brethren

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and topple those detestable vermin in the capital."

"But . . . isn't there also some kind of disillusionment because of the . . . oh . . . moodiness of Stalin?" I said, quickly adding, "Not that I believe the capitalist press."

Dr. Bernhardt paced back and forth. "The man says dis, the man says dat. Well, de glory lies with the fool, not de mule. If I lie, let me die. Listen heah: don't let nobody turn you 'round, heah? Samuel, Bruce? 'Cause on that great gettin' up mornin', see, that great big bright gettin' up morning, when de trumpets blare, you are goona be able to bare yo chest, I say bare yo chest, and *dee*-clare, and *dee*-clare, you *be*-lieved, you *be*lieved. And you'll get what's comin' to you. Oh, yes, you will. 'Cause dem folks are talkin' about concentration camps run by Stalin. By a *Communist!* DO YOU BELIEVE THAT? Man? That the Jews burned the Reichstag? WHATEVER they say, WHATEVER, you- will- *bee-lieve* that a Communist does NOT HURT PEOPLE. He don't! HE DON'T! He LOVES people. And that is why, my dear comrades, that picture is on my wall, and will remain in its place. This is one fella who is not going to be moved. This is one fella who does not say one thing on Sunday and sell out to the New York *Post* on Monday! This is one fella who has written EIGHT books of which he does not repudiate ONE solitary word. 'Cause I stand here now and you see my shadow there on the wall. And when you leave this house you can know my shadow will still be on the wall, and NEXT week, and the week after that. And my library shelves will remain intact: *Marx-Lenin-Stalin*. There will not be a mysterious disappearance one night, and you say, where Stalin, and I say, who he? Never hearda that mother! No sir, no . . . my baby daughter's cracked ribs . . ." He chuckled . . . "She believed something that I conveyed to her."

He was silent for a moment. "The isolation has not been easy. I say to my wife: Where are the people? When someone comes up to my office, I assume he is a spy. And he is. He is too eager to say yes. He fawns. He is a good eater. I watch him. Steak for lunch. What does he have for dinner? It's a

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little disgusting to watch him munching away."

There were tears in his eyes. "Who will carry on?" He looked away. Samuel promptly said, "Look, we give you our word."

I tried to shake my head.

We departed with gifts of books by Dimitrov, Hikmet, Funaroff, Ernst Toller and Stalin. As we walked through the streets, Samuel talked about the strength and affirmation he was finding in Marxism. I had thought Bernhardt's daughter was very pretty, and felt sorry about her ribs. I wondered if it was worth it. But if I could get a date with her, I wouldn't say so.

VIII

Samuel had a legendary friend, Emory, from college days. Emory had worked nights as a hotel clerk at a shady hotel; he was working on a novel; he was a flamboyant figure, "open-to-life," as Samuel put it, although with "sexual confusions." When I tried to pin Samuel down on Emory's qualities, I found out that Emory had the most uncanny ability to capture, through mimicry and satire, the essence of the Jewish mother, and particularly *his* Jewish mother.

One wintry morning, there was a knock at our bungalow door. "Yoo-hoo, Mr. Weintraub!" a high voice called. Samuel jumped and rubbed his hands, flung open the door.

A fat, bespectacled, blinking Emory stood at the door, scarf flung flamboyantly around his neck. He said, in no particular order:

"Children are starving in India. . . ."

"I'm only your mother, may your nose clot. . . ."

"What are you an Einstein with all that hair? . . ."

"Eat your heart out, you little shnorrer. . . ."

"Go to Ginsberg the robber, see if I care. . . ."

Samuel sunk to the floor in laughter. Emory sat down at the table, not pausing to take off his coat, his face red, his chest heaving: "Essen, my little kinder . . . a bissel schmaltz, if you please . . . stay away from the *shvartze*, they stink . . . do I know

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goyim? You can smell liquor from a mile away. . . .

"So it's your birthday. What are you gonna give me. . . .?"

I noticed that Emory wasn't laughing at all. His voice got more strident; he was breathless. Samuel pounded Doris on the back, and Doris said "Ouch!" He looked at me, laughing and pointing at Emory, and noticed that I wasn't laughing. I was a little jealous of all the attention Emory was getting, and didn't really think he was that funny. I hoped, though, that Samuel wouldn't take out the red tail light that he had recently purchased. In the evenings, when I talked to Samuel and Doris before the fireside, Samuel would close all the lights and shine the red light gently on me.

Emory was standing up now, pounding the table and screaming:

"Eat, eat, you little pisser, with a face that the neighborhood shakes their heads at . . . don't pull your putz, you'll get a craziness in the head. . . ."

"Ha ha ha," laughed Samuel.

IX

It was the absence of sex that made you aware of sex with Samuel. It was the total absence of sex. He talked about his brother Moshe's crush on a girl: "You should see Moshe, Doris. He has this very deep feeling about Judith, the daughter of the furrier. He said that he would like to do certain things with her, nuzzle her . . . things like that. I saw him pat her on the head on Thursday morning. I really think . . . he feels affectionately toward her. I have a hunch he's already kissed her . . . did you do things like that when you were his age, Bruce?"

"What things . . . nuzzle girls?"

"You know . . . display affection?"

"Fuck them?"

Samuel blushed. "You know. Drift toward each other . . . share things . . . foibles, tales, stories . . . like in a fairyland, a dreamlike sensation . . ."

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"He said *fuck* them, Samuel," Doris said.

Samuel changed the subject, but later on in the evening he came into my room and said he wanted to shake my hand in thanks for my "incredible honesty and spontaneity."

"You are teaching us things, Bruce, and we are learning."

"What am I teaching you?"

He shook his head. "—you extend yourself so that we may imbibe, and that we do. It is not wasted on us, believe me, Bruce. We are profiting from your experience and your suffering—"

"I—"

"You are wiser than your years, Bruce. Because of you, I'm changing. I'm becoming revolutionary in every way. I feel my manhood pulsing and surging with every revolutionary step I take." He paused. "I honestly feel, Bruce, that one day soon, I shall come to a climactic stand for the revolution."

X

It was during those winter days of unemployment insurance and welfare checks, of picket lines and walks along the deserted boardwalk, that I made a suggestion that Samuel felt changed his life. I suggested that he see a psychiatrist.

It is hard to explain why this suggestion meant so much to Samuel. After all, I had seen dozens of them beside Dr. Jackson: all sizes, shapes, races and creeds. I knew their styles and their tastes and how to talk to them. In fact, I was running out of available ones. I would look new ones up in the yellow pages and imagine what they were like from the sound of their names. My father paid the bills. I found it hard to remember who said what: I remember that for some reason one of them had a bad back and was lying down on the couch while I was sitting on a chair. He said that what he really liked to do was sculpt and that his greatest pleasure came from banging away in the basement. The clearest idea I got of why he was a psychiatrist was that it allowed him to social-climb. Since those days he has written a book on the

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joys of marijuana and is a desired guest at all parties. But I do not mean to put him down entirely: perhaps he was lying on the couch to put *me* at ease; who can say? I was never in therapy long enough to figure out a coherent explanation for what psychiatrists do. I don't know how long it would take to discover this, but I suspect it would take about ten years.

I mention all this to indicate that my suggestion to Samuel was not the result of some deep sense of compassion and understanding for him, but merely what every person in therapy says to every person out of therapy: why are you *not* in therapy? I wish I could say this came out of a sense of certitude about the value of therapy, but it doesn't; it is more like a fat person insisting that someone else consume a box of candy when the fat person is doing so.

It was, however, a great moment in Samuel's life. The gates opened. It was the beginning, too, of a friendship, and even of a business partnership: for Samuel eventually invested in a drainage corporation with Shmuel Goss, his psychiatrist. This corporation eventually went bankrupt, but that came later, long after Samuel had been treated successfully and had gone into the business world.

Shmuel Goss, like many psychiatrists, had a following: his patients. They thought he was extraordinary. Samuel added him to his gallery of greats, beside myself, Emory the great satirist, and Hilda, "the Communist Rebel Lady" (this was a paraphrase of a description of the famous Elizabeth Gurley Flynn as the "Rebel Girl" of the I.W.W., and bestowed on Hilda, who in fact was Doris' mother. Hilda owned her own house in Bedford, Mass., had once been expelled by the C.P., and made wonderful potato kugel).

Goss had a big body, a booming voice, the usual attributes. But it was new to Samuel. Goss was casual; he let patients meet each other and even overhear bits of each other's conversation and gossip. Goss let it all hang out.

This was during the time that I moved out of the cottage. I had found another girl. Samuel told me, though, that Goss believed that "Everything was healthy in sex." Shortly

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afterwards, Samuel somehow conveyed to me, amidst Victorian blushes and stammering, that his marriage was consummated.

It was during this time, too, that one night I stayed over with Samuel and Doris at the cottage. By some chance, I had gone to the bathroom and when I came out, their bedroom door was open and a red light was shining over the bed. I saw Doris in knee-high black boots. Samuel was lying nude on the floor, and she was stomping on him.

XI

During the next ten years of my own anguished life, as I have said, Samuel has kept in touch with me, reminding me of what a good friend I had been to him.

I recently received another letter from Samuel.

> Dear Bruce,
>
> It sounds like it has been a difficult year for both of us, although we have both had our share of satisfying experiences as well.
>
> All my medical examinations have proved completely negative and I really have gotten to the point where I don't consider myself in jeopardy. I appreciated your concern.
>
> I have in recent days been thinking of our friendship and I am strongly reminded of how much you helped me at a very critical time in my life.
>
> Take care.
>
> Sam.

I'll conclude with a card received from Samuel some time back, on the birth of his child. It was a quote from Dylan Thomas:

> "And then to awake, and the farm, like a wanderer white
> With the dew, come back, the cock on his shoulder; it was all
> Shining, it was Adam and maiden,
> The sky gathered again
> And the sun grew round that very day. . . ."

I do not want to give the impression that my friend Samuel was always tone-deaf.

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Siv Cedering Fox

PEACHES

There was a contest
once
for the best picture
of a peach

in China

Madame Ling
or was it Ching
sat in some yellow
pollen

then

carefully, again
she sat
upon
a piece of white

paper

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Four Poems by Peter Payack

MOTORCYCLE EVOLUTION

The size of the human brain
increased from the apelike
capacity of 500 cubic centimeters
in Australopithecus to about
1500 cc. in modern man.

It took 2 million years
for man's brain to evolve
from the motor size of
a Kawasaki 500 to that
of a Harley-Davidson Superglide.

ONLY MINUTES

It would take
an infinite number
of monkeys,
an infinite amount
of time to write
this poem using
typewriters and
random chance.

For instance,
it would take 10,000
monkeys 150 years
to achieve one "it would."

As it was,
it took this goofball
only minutes.

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THE BABBLING FOOL

An ancient Babylonian, lost in the
pages of unwritten history books, was
talking with the foreman of a local
construction company. They were discussing
the transportation of ceramic bricks back
to the 4th millenium B.C. for use in
the construction of the Tower of Babel.
However, after a little more than an hour,
the negotiations fell through.
Obviously frustrated, after sending the
Babylonian back almost 6,000 years with one
swift kick, the foreman said to me:
"The man drove a hard bargain, and
the price was right. But I just couldn't
carry out a business deal with a grown man
who babbled so. Made me feel like
the guy had his head up his ancient ass."

THE AVERAGE PERSON

Every second,
the average person
has 100 million
sensations bombarding
his body like so many
telephone messages,
with his head acting
as a switch board to sort
out the data.

When you read this poem
do you sort of get
a busy signal?

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Three Poems by Mary Kathryn Stillwell

TRAVEL PLANS

As I sat on the toilet
of a Boeing 727,
somewhere over Ohio
riding United tourist,
I imagined my last moments
of life
falling bare-assed through the sky,
trying to reach down
to pull up my pants,
then, tumbling,
trying to reach up
to pull my pants down,
so I would land
respectably dressed.

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THE CUTTING

from Haying

The sun has pulled
the dew from the grass,
leaving the roots warm, humid, soft.
The sky is blue, cloudless.
We wait for the breeze.
It comes.

The cutting begins.
I follow my father:
my tractor after his.
The umbrella shades him,
vibrates above his head.
My tractor after his,
my circle inside the circle
of his mower, I trace
the boundary of his last round.
I follow the tire treads
with my eye,
change gears for the first
sharp turns, later follow
rounded corners.

Insects swirl from the grass.
The heat presses up
from the tractor.
The sun shines.
He leads.
I follow, cutting
farther and farther
into the field's center,
until one long swath remains.

He signals and turns to watch.
I circle and approach
as the mower lays the final
grass to rest.

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LOVE POEM

to my grandfather

Riding in the wake
of your electric shock,
I was your therapy.
You pushed my plastic
carriage through the winter
with long, crazy fingers,
across the shadow of the house,
silent rubber wheels leaving tracks
in the snow,
footsteps melting into black holes.

We moved into the sun,
sticky as the yellow of an egg.
You, the white haired old man,
pushing me, the bald headed baby
before you in a Taylor Tot.
Round and round we went,
neither of us allowed to cross
the street, tightening the block;
your eyes darting like gray cars
while I scattered bears and Easter bunnies
like seeds along Dodge Street,
Capitol Avenue.

A year, my crazy man,
and I, small duck,
waddled at your side
or came quacking after.
You made bows from the laces
of my shoes, pulled
the nose from my face,
held it between your fingers,
and put it back again.
Pennies, nickels,
grew from your tongue.
Ice-cream cones flowered
from your fists.

—Mary Kathryn Stillwell

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Joe David Bellamy

17-YEAR CICADAS

In 1956 it was a hot spring in
Cincinnati
We were in English class and the
17-year cicadas were
thumping against the windows

their boxy black thoraxes
quaint as old roadsters
their bright red eyes
their yellow wings veined like the
paired hinged seeds of maple trees

They live glorious short lives
wheeling above lilac bushes
crazy with singing and
mating in mid-air and
beating their heads against treetrunks and
boys pushing lawnmowers

That summer I was fourteen
I batted .363
I was no longer a virgin
I bounced one
off the wall in the
All-Star game at Milford and
was out at third
on a muddy field

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In orange track trunks
I cut swathe after swathe
around our yard
with a new green power mower
swatting and cursing
at the 17-year cicadas

They gathered in the rich air
in squadrons
thousands of cicadas
spiraling out of warm leaves drawn
by the roar of the mower
they dive-bombed me
overwhelmed me ricocheting
from my shoulders and legs
sticking to my back
coupling madly singly and
thunking on the mower housing

This year the 17-year cicadas are back
SEVENTEEN YEARS have passed

This is not a piece of fifties nostalgia
you understand
This is a poem about the patience
of insects
the deafening sound of their mating
the incredible whirr of their wings in the trees

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Two Chairs

Giles Gordon

The room was about thirty feet by twenty. There was a door leading into the room from the hall. There was a French window, and a larger window looking over the landscape, down to the village, across the harbor, out to the bay. There was a fireplace, and in the grate early in the morning before it was cleaned were the remains of last night's fire. On the mantelpiece was an envelope file, out of which some typewritten pages obtruded, as well as a cutting from the *Observer* (6/9/70) and one from the *Times* of the previous day. There was a hardbacked exercise book, and paperback editions of *Slaughterhouse 5* by Kurt Vonnegut, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles, *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, *The Tremor of Forgery* by Patricia Highsmith, and Samuel Beckett's trilogy in one volume. There were also a couple of letters, and a bill. On the floor, tucked into the side of the fireplace, was a pile of newspapers. The floor was laid in wooden tiles: it had not been adequately sanded and sealed. Apart from the newspapers, the floor was

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empty but for two chairs. They were made of a light coloured wood, and folded. Had they been in the garden and not in the room, they would have been taken for garden chairs. The seats and shoulder rests were made of green canvas.

At 8:00 am, when the door into the room from the hall was opened for the first time that day, the chairs were placed on either side of the fireplace. Those sitting in them the previous night must have been facing the fire immediately before they stood up.

At 10:00 am they were folded up, leant against one another, against the wall at right angles to the door leading from the hall, opposite the French window.

At 11:00 am they were unfolded, placed on the patio outside the open French window, facing in the direction of the harbor.

At noon they were in the same position.

At 1:00 pm they were positioned, apparently arbitrarily, on the floor of the room. Their placing cannot be described at all exactly.

At 2:30 pm they were outside again, on the patio.

At 4:30 pm they were back inside the room, at opposite ends of the large window overlooking the harbor.

At 5:30 pm one of them was still in its position of an hour ago, by the large window. The other was, once more, on the patio outside the French window.

At 7:30 pm they were almost back to back, tucked into the alcove between the French window and the fireplace.

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At 9:00 pm they were together, side by side, facing out of the large window.

At 10:00 pm they were huddled round the fire, on either side of the fireplace.

At 10:30 pm they were together, in front of the fireplace, the right arm of the one touching the left arm of the other.

At 11:05 one of them was on its back on the floor, in approximately the center of the room. The other was still in front of the fireplace, now in the center.

At 11:08 pm one chair was still on its back in the center of the floor. The other was folded, and lay on the other side of the floor from the fireplace, in front of the large window. It had not been folded carefully. One of the metal hinges had been bent, and the canvas shoulder rest had been ripped.

At 11:10 pm one chair was where it had been two minutes previously. The chair which lay in the center of the room at 11:08 pm was broken in two. One of the legs had been yanked off.

At 11:11 pm the leg of the chair which had been separated from the chair was broken in two. There was a bloodstain on one of the pieces of leg, at the jagged end.

Next morning, it was necessary for two new chairs to be acquired. For a number of reasons this was considered preferable. By 8:00 am the two broken chairs were entirely destroyed by burning. The ash in the grate could have been of the wood burnt the previous night.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

M.F. Beal (*Space Time*) received an Atlantic Monthly Grant for her novel, *Amazon One*, published this spring by Atlantic Monthly Press. She has had short pieces in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *New American Review*, and *The Paris Review*. She now lives in Seal Rock, Oregon.

David Evanier (*Cancer of the Testicles*) published his first novel, *The Swinging Headhunters*, in Canada. His work has appeared in *Transatlantic Review*, *Choice* (Chicago), *The Nation*, and other magazines. He has been writer-in-residence at the MacDowell Colony and at the Wurlitzer Foundation in Taos, and is presently working on his second novel.

Giles Gordon (*Two Chairs*) was born in Edinburgh, Scotland. He has published four volumes of fiction and his stories are included in *Penguin Modern Stories 3*. He has recently edited *Spaces Between Words* (Hutchinson), an anthology by twelve avant-garde British writers.

INTERVIEW

Daniel Stern (*Bernard Malamud Interview*) is a novelist and critic. His eighth novel, *Final Cut*, has just been published by Viking Press. He lives in New York.

POETRY

Joe David Bellamy, Editor of *Fiction International*, is working on his first collection of poems, to be called *Olympic Gold Medalist*. He teaches at Saint Lawrence University, is author of *The New Fiction*, and has edited *Droll and Murderous Visions: American Fiction in Our Time*, forthcoming from Random House.

William Burtis studied at Hobart College and at the Iowa Writer's Workshop. His poems have appeared in *Chelsea* and *The Sou'wester*.

G.S. Sharat Chandra was born in Mysore, India. His book of poems, *April in Nanjangud*, was published as a London magazine edition in 1971, and *Once or Twice*, a chapbook, will soon be published by The Hippopotamus Press, in Sutton, England. He is poet-in-residence and Assistant Professor of English at Washington State University in Pullman, and is editor of *Kamadhenu*.

Richard Eberhart is the author of *The Quarry: New Poems* (1964), *Selected Poems 1930-1965*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize, *Shifts of Being: Poems* (1968), *Fields of Grace* (1973), and *Collected Poems*, coming out this fall from Oxford. He is also the winner of the Harriet Monroe Poetry Prize and the Bollingen Prize. Honorary President of the Poetry Society of America, he is Professor of English and Poet in Residence at Dartmouth and this spring at Columbia University.

David Fisher, a native North Carolinian, now lives in San Francisco where he teaches a small writing workshop. His recent book is called *Requiem for Heurtebise: Homage to Jean Cocteau*.

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Siv Cedering Fox's "Peaches" is from her new book of poems, *Mother Is* (Stein & Day, 1975). Her other books are *Cup of Cold Water* (1973), *Letters from the Island* (1973), and *Letters from Hegel* (1974). She has published several books of translations to and from Swedish.

David Ignatow has recently published two volumes—a book of new poems called *Facing the Tree* (1975), and *Selected Poems* (1975), chosen and introduced by Robert Bly. He teaches at York College, CUNY, and at Columbia University School of the Arts.

Louis Jenkins lives in Duluth, Minnesota, where he operates the Knife River Press. He has published a chapbook entitled *The Well Digger's Wife* (Minnesota Writers' Publishing House), and his poems have appeared in *American Poetry Review* and other magazines.

Adam Lefevre is 24 and lives in Iowa City, Iowa. This is his second appearance in *The Paris Review*.

Peter Payack is 25 and has published works in *The Village Voice*, *The Goddard Journal*, *Some*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and a number of other magazines. His first chapbook, *The White Line*, will be published this summer by The New York Culture Review Press.

Lawrence Raab's poems have recently appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Antaeus*, *The Iowa Review*, and *The American Scholar*. His first collection of poems, *Mysteries of the Horizon*, was published by Doubleday in 1972, and he is completing a second volume, tentatively titled *The Collection of Cold Weather*.

A.G. Sobin is currently teaching writing at the University of Utah while translating works of Jean Follian on an NEA grant. He is co-editor of *The Ark River Review*, and his work has appeared recently in *The Iowa Review*, *Poetry*, *Northwest*, *Falcon*, and other magazines.

Albert Stainton is co-editor of *Bartleby's Review*. His work has been published in *Truck*, *Epoch*, *Shaman*, and *Poetry Now*, and is soon to appear in several other magazines. He recently published a chapbook called *The Crossing*, and is now working on a book-length manuscript.

Mary Kathryn Stillwell was born in Omaha, Nebraska. She has lived in New York City since 1969, and is working on her second novel. This is her first appearance in print.

Richard Stull was born in Ohio. He is presently living in Iowa City, Iowa where he is a student at the Writer's Workshop.

Peter Viereck's Pulitzer Prize-winning book of poems, *Terror and Decorum*, was recently reprinted by The Greenwood Press. His two "Tombwomb" poems are from a book still in manuscript called *Applewood*. Author of a dozen books of poetry and history, including *Conservation Revisited* (Macmillan Free Press) and *New and Selected Poems* (1967), he holds the Alumnae Foundation chair at Mt. Holyoke College.

Richard Wilbur was recently elected President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His most recent publications include a book of poems entitled *Walking to Sleep* (1969), a translation of Molière's *School for Wives*

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which was performed on Broadway in 1971, a book of poems and drawings for children entitled *Opposites* (1973), and the introduction to a new edition of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*, which appeared in 1974. He hopes soon to publish a new book of poems and a book of critical essays.

RECOLLECTIONS

George Wickes (*A Natalie Barney Garland*) teaches at the University of Oregon and is editor of the *Northwest Review*. His books include *Durrell and Miller: A Private Correspondence* and *Americans in Paris* (Doubleday-Paris Review Editions), and he has interviewed Aldous Huxley and Henry Miller for *The Paris Review*.
The Capote interview was done for Mr. Wickes by Fayette B. Hickox and George A. Plimpton.

ART

Joe Brainard (Cover) is a painter and writer who lives and works in Manhattan. He was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His next one-man exhibition will take place in the fall of 1975 at the Fishbach Gallery.

Philip Pearlstein (Portfolio) paints and lives in Manhattan. He teaches at Brooklyn College and is represented by the Allan Frumkin Gallery. His latest exhibition is at Gimpel Fils Gallery, London and a retrospective show of his prints and drawings is currently circulating throughout the United States.

Michael John Weber (Table of Contents Drawing) has previously exhibited photography, etching and sculpture in San Francisco and Berkeley, California. He has recently moved to New York City where he works very hard publishing other people's books.

* * *

ERRATA #60

The last three pages of Mr. Matthiessen's story from *Far Tortuga* were incorrectly arranged. The section which begins "The catboats from the *Eden* . . ." on page 76 and ends "Amen." on page 77 should follow the sentence "Light and sky." on page 75.

The submitted manuscript of Mr. Disch's poem "On Reading Shelley" was missing a line—an error which the author has since discovered. The line "Swooning, yet wishing the promised moment near—" should be inserted after the eleventh line.

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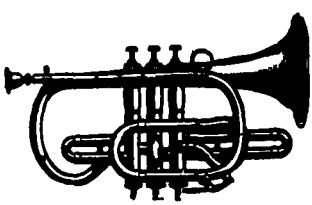

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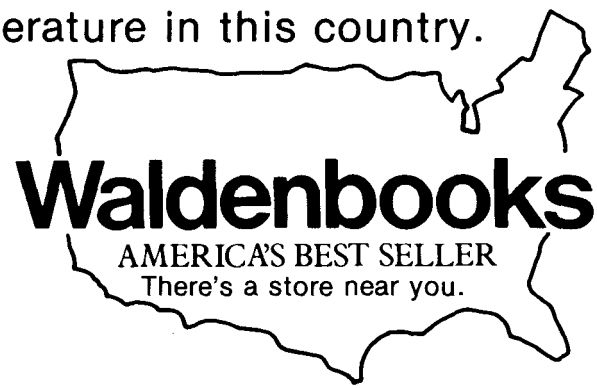

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